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# National Evaluation of the Capacity Building Programme for Local Government

## **Annex 3. Direct Support in Poor and Weak Local Authorities: Emerging Findings**



# National Evaluation of the Capacity Building Programme for Local Government

## **Annex 3. Direct Support in Poor and Weak Local Authorities: Emerging Findings**

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# The Policy Research Institute

The Policy Research Institute is one of the UK's leading university-based centres for applied economic and social research. Founded in 1987, we have an established track-record of delivering high quality research, evaluation and consultancy for a wide range of clients including central government departments, regional and local development agencies, local authorities and regeneration partnerships, and international bodies like the European Commission. Providing a multi-disciplinary environment for research and evaluation, we work to improve policy and practice across a range of fields including labour markets and skills, economic development and urban regeneration, enterprise and SMEs, local and regional governance and social inclusion and the third sector.

Our aim is to provide high quality research that meets the needs of our clients and contributes to the public good and the advancement of knowledge. We seek to combine customer focus with the highest standards of research practice.



# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Take-up of Direct Support

Take-up of Direct Support by councils rated as 'poor' or 'weak' by the Audit Commission has been strong. Of those that were rated as poor or weak in 2002, 72% had received Direct Support. The same figures were 90% for 2003 and 76% for 2004. Of the ten authorities identified as in the lowest two categories (no stars and 1 star) in CPA 2005, eight had already received Direct Support.

## 1.2 Overall impact on the sector

There are significant problems of attributing causality in comparing take-up of Direct Support against improving council performance, measured in terms of overall CPA category. Nevertheless, this data and analysis suggests that those authorities that have received Direct Support have improved more strongly than have those that did not receive it.

## 1.3 Accessing Direct Support

Work with a small number of in-depth case study authorities, suggests that the process of accessing Direct Support was positive, clear and helped them to design activities to focus on organisational development. The process was also thought to have improved over time with the introduction of pro-formas and the availability of previous examples of bids for Direct Support.

## 1.4 Activities supported by Direct Support

The types of activity supported through Direct Support included:

- Councillor training and development
- Management training and development.
- Development of organisational systems, with a particular emphasis on performance management, human resources, financial management and project management.

Other important themes included support for improvement in procurement, partnership building, service improvement, community leadership and communications.

Evidence from the qualitative case studies suggested that Direct Support tended to be used to support activities which were integral to a broader

improvement plan, meaning that in many cases the authorities' own resources were used to augment funding received through Direct Support.

## 1.5 Impact of Direct Support

Overall, authorities receiving Direct Support from the CBP were most likely to improve in performance than stay the same or decline:

- Of the 28 local authorities that received Direct Support, 18 (64%) had improved their CPA rating between 2002 and 2004.
- Five of these (18%), had improved their CPA rating by more than one category.
- A further seven (25%), had remained in the same CPA category.
- Three (11%), had seen their CPA rating deteriorate.

Superficially at least, this suggests that those authorities in receipt of Direct Support were more likely than others to improve and also were more likely to improve by more than 1 CPA category, although this may equally be related to an initial low rating and other interventions and support available as a result, as well as the galvanising effect of receiving a poor or weak rating.

Activities funded through Direct Support had led to positive impacts at both individual and organisational levels. While there were differences between different activities and between the different case studies, the role of Direct Support appeared to be positive in facilitating improvements. This positive impact appeared to stem from a number of features, including:

- The bidding process for Direct Support helped to concentrate improvement activities on organisational development initiatives.
- The capacity to tailor interventions to meet specific local needs.
- The scale of resources available allowed a level of activity to be developed which could have a significant impact on the organisation.
- Training and development activities could reach a 'critical mass' of officers and members, helping to facilitate organisational change.
- The context in which Direct Support was delivered meant that the need for improvement had been accepted and the organisation had already decided to commit significant resources to improvement activities.
- The context also meant that improvement activity had significant senior management support.
- Because Direct Support bids had to be approved externally, the activities that flowed from them had a level of additional credibility and legitimacy as a result.
- Direct Support helped to fund activities that opened the authorities up to external and alternative ideas and ways of doing things.

## 1.6 Conclusions

Despite its limitations, context analysis comparing changes in CPA ratings over a period of time against take-up of Direct Support suggests that there is a correlation between use of Direct Support and improvement. This data on its own, however, cannot support any attribution of causality. Qualitative research in a small number of in-depth case study authorities and evidence from the lighter touch case studies suggests that there may be some causality between take-up of Direct Support and improvement.

Work taken forward through Direct Support was broadly similar in content to that developed in the National Programmes and Improvement Partnerships. However, Direct Support work was more rapid and focused than that enabled through Improvement Partnerships and was of a significantly more extensive scale than that enabled via the National Programmes alone.

Evidence from both the in-depth qualitative and lighter touch case studies suggests that Direct Support had clearly been influential as a means of delivering improvement activity. The work funded through Direct Support had helped to improve capacity at individual, team/department and organisational levels. There were widespread reports from respondents in these case studies – both direct beneficiaries and individuals with an overview of the authority – that the ‘culture’ of the organisation was changing, becoming more focused on improvement, more committed to ongoing development of staff and systems and more open to looking at a range of options.

Direct Support was so successful in facilitating organisational change and improvement because of the context within which it was delivered, the scale of activity that it enabled and the degree to which it could be integrated with the authorities’ specific improvement needs. In particular, Direct Support was used to support plans designed by the organisation itself. As a result, the activities funded by Direct Support received the full commitment of the organisation. There was thus a general commitment from senior management level down to ensure that these activities succeeded (for instance in terms of take-up) and that the organisation took full advantage of them, including by being able to make changes as a result of them. Direct Support activities also focused simultaneously on improving systems and on improving the ability of staff to work within them. There was also evidence of conscious attempts to facilitate the translation of individual to organisational development and vice-a-versa. It thus facilitated capacity building at both an individual and organisational level concurrently. The scale of intervention meant that a critical mass of development activity could take place. For instance, management training was able to reach a sufficient number of managers at any particular level to promote group as opposed to individual change.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Background

This report summarises emerging findings from initial scoping analysis and case study fieldwork with authorities that have received Direct Support from the Capacity Building Programme (CBP) for local government. The report is one of a series of outputs from the national evaluation of the CBP, being undertaken by a team of researchers at the Policy Research Institute (PRI) at Leeds Metropolitan University and the Cities Research Unit at the University of West of England.

### 2.2 The Capacity Building Programme for Local Government

The Capacity Building Programme for local government was launched in 2003 as a joint Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) / Local Government Association (LGA) initiative to support capacity building and improvement activities within local authorities in England. The CBP has supported four main streams of improvement and capacity building activity in local authorities:

- **Pilot Projects:** the CBP supported a large number of pilot projects which were to “trial innovative ways of working and ‘pave the way’ for other authorities”.
- **National Programmes:** the CBP initially focused on the establishment or expansion of several National Programmes, delivered both by central bodies (such as the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), Employers Organisation for Local Government (EO), the 4Ps and framework contractors, delivering training and other organisational development support to local authorities.
- **Improvement Partnerships:** Since 2004, the CBP has also channelled financial resources through ‘Improvement Partnerships’; groups of local authorities (including Fire and Rescue Authorities and National Parks Authorities) established on a regional, sub-regional or County-wide basis to undertake collective improvement activity.
- **Direct Support:** the CBP has also provided Direct Support to authorities defined as either ‘poor’ or ‘weak’ through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process. Further details of the type of improvement activity developed through Direct Support are set out in Section 3.

As the CBP has developed decisions have been taken to curtail funding to Pilot Projects and to Direct Support. Subsidised access to the National Programmes is also to be increasingly integrated with Improvement

Partnerships, which are increasingly intended to be the vehicle for delivering central government support for local government capacity building activities.

## 2.3 The national evaluation

The evaluation of the Capacity Building Programme has been underway since late 2004. A scoping phase was conducted until May 2005, including a short evaluation of the Pilot Programmes. The main phase of the evaluation commenced in September 2005 and has four main components:

- **Improvement Partnerships** – Qualitative research, including interviews and focus groups and a documentary review are being undertaken in seven case study Improvement Partnerships. The fieldwork is being carried out in two tranches. The first, baseline stage, was undertaken between September 2005 and December 2005. A report summarising the results of this was completed in January 2006. The second phase of the Improvement Partnership fieldwork is due to take place in the same period in 2006. The aim is to compare progress over-time in each of the case studies, to produce evidence of what approaches are currently being deployed in the Partnerships and which are having positive benefits, and why.
- **National Programmes** – This involves undertaking qualitative research (again including interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis) in eighteen case study local authorities. The research focuses on a series of different levels within the case study authorities. Sixteen of the case studies were chosen for maximum participation in the National Programmes. In these, the emphasis is on the impact of participation on the individuals concerned and the translation of this to organisational change, including what facilitated and blocked this transition. A further two case studies have been chosen for non-participation in the National Programmes, to assess the reasons for not participating and the alternative types of improvement and capacity building activity that might be underway. Case study work in local authorities is supplemented by consultation with the National Programme Providers and examination of the evaluative and management information collected by them. This work is currently underway and will be completed by October 2006.
- **Direct Support** – A number of research activities consider the role and impact of Direct Support on local authorities.
- **Stakeholder Consultation** – A number of qualitative interviews with stakeholders are planned. This work is to assess the impact of the CBP at a sectoral level, following the multi-levelled analytical model developed in the scoping phase of the research. This work took place between September and December 2006.

## 2.4 Direct Support Methodology

The contribution of Direct Support from the CBP to authorities rated as Poor or Weak has been assessed in several stages:

- Context analysis
- Scoping consultation
- In-depth case studies
- Lighter-touch case studies

The analysis presented in this emerging findings report draws on evidence from the scoping and in-depth case study stages. This will be augmented later by evidence drawn from the wider group of light-touch case studies.

#### 2.4.1 Context analysis

Initial context analysis considered the take-up of Direct Support and the types of improvement activity that this has supported. This was then mapped against changes in CPA category by authorities that have been rated in the past as 'Poor' or 'Weak' by the Audit Commission. This type of analysis has some considerable limitations, particularly because of the difficulty of attributing causality and also because there have been several changes in CPA methodology over time, which mean that longitudinal analysis is problematic. In addition, many authorities that have received Direct Support have only been subject to one CPA rating and as such the available sample of Direct Support recipients is considerably limited.

#### 2.4.2 Scoping stage

This analysis was complemented by some initial qualitative – scoping – interviews in four authorities which had received Direct Support. These semi-structured interviews were used to aid the interpretation of the wider data on performance change in relation to take-up of Direct Support. They were also used to shape the fieldwork and analysis to be undertaken in subsequent stages. The results of the initial scoping interviews were presented in *Initial Scoping of Direct Support in Poor and Weak Local Authorities and Summary of Baseline Findings in Improvement Partnerships* (Nunn, 2006) in January 2006.

#### 2.4.3 In-depth case study fieldwork

Resources allowed only a small amount of in-depth case study fieldwork. Fieldwork visits were conducted in four authorities that had received Direct Support. The research included:

- **Scrutiny of documentary evidence** – such as bids for Direct Support from the CBP, Corporate Plans, CPA reports, Corporate Assessments and Improvement Plans, organisational and staff development strategies, as well as available evaluation materials.
- **Structured interviews with senior officers and elected members** – were used to gain an understanding of wider capacity building and organisational development activities underway in the authority, with a view to assessing the extent to which activities funded by Direct Support were embedded in the authority and their relative importance and leverage. These interviews also helped to frame the context for activities funded by Direct Support and their place in the 'improvement journey'.

- **Structured interviews with beneficiaries** – these included staff and elected members who benefited directly from Direct Support activities, either because they had received training or development or were particularly affected by the introduction or improvement of systems and processes.

Throughout, the emphasis was on understanding the impact of Direct Support activities at the individual, team/department and organisational levels and the linkages that allow the translation of impact between these levels.

#### **2.4.4 Lighter-touch case studies**

The in-depth case study work will be augmented by lighter touch case studies. These are drawn from interviews with one or two key individuals in a wider group of case study authorities.

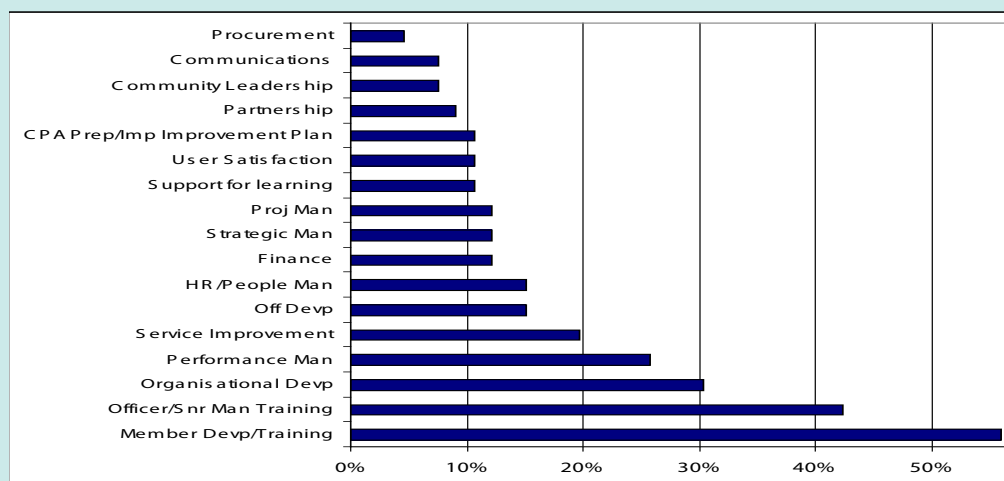
## 3 Direct Support to 'Poor' and 'Weak' Authorities

Local authorities designated as 'Poor' or 'Weak' by CPA have, since 2003, been able to access resources for organisational development and improvement through the Capacity Building Programme for local government, which is jointly financed through central government and the Local Government Association. Typically, this support is provided through financial allocations against a bid for support from a single local authority, though there are cases of joint projects. Bids are developed by the authorities themselves, often with the support of the DCLG regionally, the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). Bids often also address specific weaknesses identified by CPA and the authorities themselves in their improvement plans.

Between March 2004 and December 2005 the DCLG/LGA Capacity Building Programme made allocations of support to 66 local authorities through the Direct Support channel, with a total allocation of around £15m.

The nature of Direct Support means that the types of improvement activities that are funded differ between councils. However, it is possible to indicatively categorise the different types of improvement activity that have been supported. The most popular type of capacity building activity supported by Direct Support is member development and training, followed by officer and senior management training (as illustrated in Figure 1 below), organisational development such as improvement of business systems and performance management. Human resources improvement, officer training and the development of corporate and strategic planning were also important.

**Figure 1:** Types of activity funded by Direct Support





# 4 Context Analysis

## 4.1 Background and limitations of context analysis

It would be misleading to attempt to define a clear causal linkage between receipt of Direct Support from the CBP and change in CPA rating over time for many reasons:

- CPA has changed methodology several times and as such there is no valid time-series. Change in CPA category over time, especially in regard to the most recent assessment, referred to as the 'Harder Test', does not represent continuous assessment of progress against a fixed benchmark.
- Many of the allocations of resources to support improvement through the Direct Support mechanism have been made to District Councils where there is no time series of changing CPA judgements to measure against.
- Local authorities are subject to a great many influences and it is therefore impossible to control for the impact of Direct Support, excluding these other factors, in this sort of analysis. This is particularly the case in recovering authorities which typically experience multiple improvement interventions, in addition to support provided through the CBP.

As such, analysis of the changing CPA ratings of authorities which have received Direct Support should be used only to better understand the context within which Direct Support is being deployed rather than to understand a direct causal relationship.

For single and upper tier authorities it is possible to compare their ratings from CPA over time, albeit keeping the important caveats and qualifications noted above in mind. There are now four years of ratings to compare, though because of the recent changes to the nomenclature used and the methodology, it is necessary first to develop a means of comparing the different terminology used to describe overall ratings. The comparison used here is detailed in Table 1. However, in making this comparison it is important to remember that the change in terminology was not merely superficial but represented a change also in CPA methodology which was explicitly intended to make CPA a more stringent assessment of performance and capacity.

CPA Pre-2005	CPA 2005
Excellent	4 Stars
Good	3 Stars
Fair	2 Stars
Weak	1 Star
Poor	0 Stars

## 4.2 Take up of Direct Support

Of the 32 top tier and single tier authorities categorised as either Poor or Weak in CPA 2002, 72% (23) have received Direct Support from the CBP. Of those that were categorised as Poor or Weak at CPA 2003, 90% have now received Direct Support through the CBP. Of those that were Poor and Weak in 2004 76% have received Direct Support. Of the ten authorities identified as in the lowest two categories (no stars and 1 star) in CPA 2005, eight had already received Direct Support.

Of the 9 authorities that were Poor or Weak in 2002 but have not subsequently received Direct Support from the CBP, the majority have gone on to demonstrate improvement in CPA terms. All but one had improved by the time that Direct Support was available and seven received a rating of 2 Stars or more in the most recent (2005) assessment and a Direction of Travel Statement of 'Improving Well'. Bristol and Hackney have both shown progress but this is less impressive, receiving only 1 star in the most recent assessment and a less impressive Direction of Travel statement of 'Improving Adequately'. While Bury had demonstrated improvement in its overall rating prior to 2005 and in the 2005 assessment received 2 stars, its Direction of Travel statement is still subject to review.

It should be noted that while these authorities have not received Direct Support, many of them have received other support from central government and from other sources, including other parts of the CBP. For instance, while Swindon was Poor in 2002 it has subsequently received large scale financial support from the CBP to subsidise access to assistance from Kent County Council to improve its Social Services performance through the Local Government Franchising model, itself developed partially with support from the CBP. As such it is not possible to conclude from this evidence either that improvement might have occurred in all local authorities regardless of access to Direct Support, or that the relative lack of improvement in CPA terms in a small number of authorities is explicable by their lack of engagement with Direct Support.

## 4.3 CPA ratings of councils accessing Direct Support

Overall, authorities receiving Direct Support from the CBP were most likely to improve in performance than stay the same or decline:

- Of the 28 local authorities that received Direct Support, 18 (64%) had improved their CPA rating between 2002 and 2004.
- Five of these (18%), had improved their CPA rating by more than one category.
- A further seven (25%), had remained in the same CPA category.
- Three (11%), had seen their CPA rating deteriorate.

Superficially at least, this suggests (as shown in Table 2) that those authorities in receipt of Direct Support were more likely than others to

improve and also were more likely to improve by more than 1 CPA category, although this may equally be related to an initial low rating and other interventions and support available as a result, as well as the galvanising effect of receiving a poor or weak rating.

**Table 2:** Comparison of Change in CPA Rating 2002-2004, by receipt of Direct Support

<b>CBP Direct Support</b>	<b>Declined</b>	<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>Improved</b>	<b>Improved by more than 1 Category</b>
With Direct Support	11%	25%	64%	18%
Without Direct Support	2%	59%	39%	4%

However, it is too simplistic to identify receipt of Direct Support with improvement or to suggest that where authorities failed to improve or even where their rating declined, that this was due to a failure of Direct Support on the basis of this evidence. For instance, some of the authorities which received Direct Support only received this after their CPA rating had begun to improve. Moreover, it would be sensible to expect that there would be a significant time gap between the approval of capacity building support, the development and implementation of capacity building activities, the realisation of organisational change and improvement to feed through into change in CPA rating. As such, a longer time-series would be needed to make such judgements, even if other counter-factual influences could be controlled. However, this is difficult because of the change in CPA methodology and terminology and caution should be exercised over the use of the analysis below which compares change over the period 2002-2005, using the comparison of CPA ratings set out in Table 1.

This analysis shows that between 2002 and 2005:

- 75% of authorities in receipt of Direct Support had improved.
- 29% of authorities in receipt of Direct Support had improved by more than one CPA category.
- 18% had stayed the same.
- 7% had declined in terms of CPA rating.

Comparing between the most recent two CPA assessments in 2004 and 2005:

- 10% had improved.
- 4% had improved by more than one CPA category.
- 35% had remained in a roughly comparable category.
- 11% had declined.

<b>Table 3: Change in CPA Rating 02-05, by receipt of Direct Support</b>					
	<b>CBP Direct Support</b>	<b>Declined</b>	<b>Stayed the same</b>	<b>Improved</b>	<b>Improved by more than 1 category</b>
<b>2002-05</b>	With Direct Support	7%	18%	75%	29%
	Without Direct Support	6%	50%	42%	6%
<b>2004-05</b>	With Direct Support	11%	35%	10%	4%
	Without Direct Support	16%	64%	16%	1%

Table 3 above shows that when comparing CPA performance over time in this way, improvement was strongest in those authorities that received Direct Support. Again however, it does not on its own demonstrate causality and must therefore be treated with some caution. Nevertheless this analysis does imply that Direct Support, as part of a package of measures to assist improvement in poorly performing councils is achieving some success.

## 5 Findings from qualitative fieldwork

### 5.1 Context

The case study authorities were very different in nature. One was a small District Council with small resources, in a largely rural area. Three were unitaries in largely urban metropolitan Boroughs, facing significant challenges associated with the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and the communities that these supported.

All case study authorities had faced a watershed moment in the publication of their CPA rating, though Corporate Governance Inspections prior to CPA had also performed a similar role. Respondents in several case study authorities noted that the poor inspection/assessments were initially challenged within the organisation. This reticence to accept the judgement of external inspectors was associated with an insular and embedded organisational culture. Typically, there were a number of common elements to this culture, as perceived by respondents:

- Councillors who had served long-terms.
- The persistence of traditional council committee structures or a lack of engagement and capacity in newer political structures such as overview and scrutiny.
- A commitment to the delivery of in-house services and a lack of willingness to consider the delivery of services in new ways, even where these are retained in-house.
- A lack of documented strategic vision for the council and/or the local community. This might be through the absence of a statement of corporate vision or lack of engagement with the development of a community vision.
- Insufficient alignment of organisational resources with organisational priorities.
- A lack of trust between staff and management, and between officers and elected members.
- Low staff morale.

A wide range of specific weaknesses were noted by respondents and through scrutiny of CPA reports, Corporate Assessments and Improvement Plans. While there were unique dynamics to these in each case study authority, some strong themes emerged. Typically, the authorities had weaknesses in the capacity among staff at middle management, a lack of leadership capacity among senior officers and a lack of familiarity with modernisation and alternative ways of organising local government among elected members. These were combined with weaknesses in systems and

procedures, particularly in relation to financial and performance management, project and programme management. A negative CPA rating had often served to damage further the morale of staff, and many felt that while they now recognised some general criticisms, the overall assessment often did not reflect the value of many 'islands' of 'excellence' and 'good practice'.

The initial resistance to accepting a negative inspection rating had been overcome in most of the case study authorities. However, this had often been a difficult process and in most cases had involved the replacement of all or significant parts of the senior management team. In places, this had also been accompanied by changes in political leadership such as change in political control, change in leader or a change in political structures, with a move to having an elected mayor, supported by council manager. In one case, the authority had also seen a major change in the composition of the whole council, with many new elected members having little or no previous experience of being a councillor. While these changes had in places also created capacity gaps and challenges, they had also generally been associated with the acceptance of the results of external performance assessment and increased commitment to addressing the specific weaknesses that were identified. Generally, while each case study authority had its own unique dynamics, this increased commitment to improvement was characteristic of the acceptance of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda.

The role of external assistance in securing this transition was notable. Respondents noted that the role of central government lead officials was to encourage this transition. However, once this commitment was in place, some respondents felt that close external monitoring could be unhelpful, especially if the result was to repeat earlier criticisms or absorb excessive amounts of staff time in preparing for external scrutiny rather than delivering improvement activities. While it was accepted that there was a role for continued encouragement, some felt that expectations about the possible pace of reform were unrealistic and could have the impact of further damaging staff morale.

## 5.2 Accessing Direct Support

All four case studies reported that the process of accessing Direct Support was positive. Respondents were generally clear that they had understood the process and tended to judge that the amount of support that they had received from central government representatives at regional level and by their 'lead official' had been appropriate. Indeed, in most cases the individual assistance from DCLG at national or regional level or from the IDeA were reported to have been instrumental in shaping the initial bid for support.

Several of the case study authorities had been successful with more than one approach for Direct Support. Where this was the case they tended to report that their later experience of accessing Direct Support was smoother and

more effective. This was attributed to the introduction of improved pro-formas and the availability of previous examples of successful bids as well as improved guidance, support and improved understanding on the part of authorities themselves of their improvement and capacity building needs. The pro-formas used for shaping bids to Direct Support were thought to be helpful in ensuring that individual staff development activities were linked to organisational development.

In one case, the second approach for Direct Support had been shaped by evaluation of activities developed with the first. This highlighted the need to develop increased engagement with a wider group of staff to ensure a wider commitment to improvement activities and to ensure that these met the needs of staff and the organisation. As a result the authority engaged in a wider process of consultation in the process of developing the bid and this was thought to be successful in ensuring wide-spread ownership and a greater degree of emphasis on organisational change.

### 5.3 Types of capacity building activity funded by Direct Support

The types of activity developed with the help of Direct Support in the in-depth case studies broadly reflect those developed in authorities receiving Direct Support as a wider group. Details of these themes and the specifics of the approach taken are set out under the relevant headings below.

#### 5.3.1 Cultural change

All the case study authorities had attempted at least some degree of change in the 'culture' of the organisation. Some of them expressed this explicitly as a defined stream of improvement work. However, even then, the achievement of change in organisational culture was to be achieved through other activities. This included changes to customer services processes; performance management and learning and development processes. As such attempts to change organisational culture were integrated with a range of subsidiary activities which are described separately below. In one case, Direct Support had been used to engage external support in the form of a 'change agent' to support activities to improve the use of performance management, back office support services (personnel, finance, administration and research).

However, a small number features were notable about these activities:

- It was seen as important in a number of case studies that activities were developed with the input and consultation of staff.
- Culture change was seen to underpin a range of more specific improvements in services and corporate functions which were related to the commitment of staff to do things better and to be supported by organisational systems to achieve this.

- Staff morale, motivation and recruitment and retention were linked to organisational culture – to being an organisation where staff are happy and want to work and remain.

### 5.3.2 Project management

Two of the case studies had developed strands of activity around project management. Prior to the development of capacity building, activity in relation to project management was undertaken because they both lacked any established project management procedures and because staff did not have skills and competencies in this area. In both cases, activities have involved training a wider group of staff, to raise their awareness of project management issues, as well as more detailed training on project management techniques to staff that are likely to manage projects. In both cases this has also been accompanied by implementation of standardised project management procedures across the organisation.

In one case this was firmly part of the Direct Support bid, while in the other, the implementation of standardised procedures had only been undertaken after the initial Direct Support funded training had been completed. In this instance the council had gone on to develop a two-tier system with full Prince2 methodology being adopted for large scale projects, whereas smaller projects are approached with a much simpler methodology which was thought to be more 'appropriate' and proportional. The other authority also stopped short of full Prince2 methods because this was thought to involve disproportionate administration and investment in relation to the authority's needs.

Generally, several features of the activities undertaken were clearly important to their success:

- Senior level commitment to and understanding of the rationale behind project management and the procedures and techniques that were being implemented. This helped to ensure that these procedures became part of organisational systems and processes.
- Training and development on a wide scale, ensuring that there were less barriers to translating individual development to organisational change.
- Training and development linked to specific systems and procedures being implemented in the authority, meaning that individual development was closely linked to organisational change.
- Development of approaches to project management that were proportional to the needs of the organisation and did not involve excessive bureaucracy or administration.

### 5.3.3 Visioning and priorities

Two of the case study authorities had used Direct Support to conduct work on establishing a vision and an associated list of strategic priorities to guide the strategic direction of the organisation. In both cases, while CPA had identified a lack of strategic direction, the initial reaction within both organisations was to resist this change. In one case, this originated from senior officers while in the other it arose from the political leadership. In



both cases however, changes in political leadership or in political structures had helped to overcome this resistance.

In developing a statement of strategic direction, both organisations were encouraged by their central government lead official to utilise the support of the IDeA. While both organisations welcomed the help that IDeA provided, there were some reported concerns about the extent to which they were 'encouraged' to use IDeA rather than others and the lack of any effective procurement process.

IDeA support helped each organisation to establish an organisational vision and statement of priorities through a variety of mechanisms. In one case IDeA support consisted of 'facilitation' and other support for a series of consultation and visioning events at which senior managers and elected members from all political parties were encouraged to debate the future direction and core purpose of the organisation. They were also encouraged to discuss the appropriate roles of elected members and senior officers respectively. Indeed these events also helped elected members from different political parties to discuss the extent to which they may cooperate to ensure that the council's strategic direction was consistent and could be sustained even in the event of a change in political control/leadership. The outcome of this work was a cross party statement of priorities for the organisation. Subsequently, staff time has been funded to integrate these priorities into the corporate plan. The authority is now working to align its resources with these priorities through integrating them into individual service and investment plans.

In the other case study authority, Direct Support had been used to access critical challenge from the IDeA. This external scrutiny was mainly devoted to 'scoping' the extent of necessary change in the organisation and a 'reality check' to test the viability of options and to prioritise improvement activities.

In both cases, several features of the activity undertaken were notable:

- Direct Support was used to support activities which would be fundamental to the future direction of the authority.
- Securing this change involved a significant shift in the commitment of the organisation's leaders.
- Gaining cross party political support for the statement allowed a more substantial degree of organisational commitment, as staff could be more certain that work on achieving change would not be discarded in the event of a change in political leadership.
- The production of the statement of priorities or strategic direction was only the first step and a much longer process of aligning organisational resources, particularly staffing and investment planning, with these priorities.
- External assistance helped to secure organisational commitment, overcoming tensions between different officers and/or elected members.

### 5.3.4 Development of political systems and structures

In two of the case study authorities, Direct Support has been used to develop political structures, particular overview and scrutiny functions. The background for this type of activity was the transition to new political structures, a recognition that these are not always working effectively (a realisation promoted by CPA) and the election of new councillors who were not familiar with these political structures.

In one authority, overview and scrutiny functions were strengthened through support from the IDeA. This involved diagnostic support to identify the precise nature of improvement needs. Subsequently, an IDeA officer offered a set number of days to lead an example Overview and Scrutiny review of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). This was not only a significant piece of work in its own right but helped to build the confidence and skills of staff and elected members on the Overview and Scrutiny committee in order that they would be more capable and willing to undertake future reviews without this external support. In addition, the example scrutiny project was used to develop a set of guidelines for undertaking future similar scrutinies. Further, the Overview and Scrutiny committee was encouraged to plan its activities on a year by year basis, with these plans aligned with the council's calendar, thereby making scrutiny more integrated with the council's business.

In several other cases, political structures were strengthened through the training of elected members. Activities targeted at the development of elected members more generally is detailed below. However, in one other case study, development activities were particularly targeted at members' understanding of political structures and also at developing committee members' capacity to operate in new committee structures. These activities focussed on committee chairing and questioning skills.

In the authority where the IDeA had supported the development of an example scrutiny review, the following was notable:

- Where this was successful, this was attributed to 'learning by doing' strengthening individual and group confidence by staff and councillors being supported to undertake the task directly.
- Indeed, the limitations of the approach were identified as a lack of engagement of some committee members, thereby constraining their ability to learn by doing.
- There were benefits to be gained by utilising external support with knowledge and overview of the way in which political structures, particularly overview and scrutiny, operate in other local authorities.

### 5.3.5 Development of elected members

Development of elected members was a stream of activity supported by Direct Support in all but one of the in-depth case studies and where it was not, this activity was underway but was funded through mainstream resources rather than through Direct Support. The background to developing this activity was threefold:

- The election of large numbers of new councillors, including cabinet members with no prior experience of being a councillor.
- A lack of familiarity with, or ineffective of new political structures, identified, for example, through CPA.
- Poor working relationships between elected members and senior officers and the confusion of roles.

The types of issues that have been addressed in development activity include understanding the roles and responsibilities of different elected members (such as portfolio holders, committee chairs, committee members, ward councillors) and senior officers. Activities also focused on understanding council and local government procedures such as finance and performance management and CPA. Other development activities focused on community leadership. Councillor development in these areas was promoted through a number of different mechanisms, such as:

- Visits to other councils.
- Internal workshops.
- Participation on the IDeA Leadership Academy.
- Participation on the IDeA Modern Member programme.
- Participation on the IDeA Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny programme.
- Individual councillor mentoring, undertaken through the IDeA's Peer Clearing House.

In addition to the development of individual councillors' skills and knowledge, some case study authorities were developing job descriptions with training plans and skills audits associated with them.

Notable features of councillor development activities were:

- The recognition of the need to develop councillor training and development activity was precipitated by a change of elected members and problems in political leadership identified by CPA.
- Councillor development activity were targeted both at familiarising new elected members with council procedures and with promoting acceptance of the need for change and the local government modernisation agenda.
- Councillor development was seen as key to successfully adopting modernised political structures, in particular overview and scrutiny.
- The emphasis on learning from other councils and elected members in other councils.
- There was a mixture of single party and mixed party activities. Mixed party activities helped to build closer cross-party working relationships.

### 5.3.6 Management development

Management development activity was a central element of Direct Support funded improvement projects in two of the case studies. In both cases, this was focused at both senior and middle management levels. In both cases, work included the development of competency frameworks, skills assessments and development activity mapped onto these competencies. The background to this activity was a recognition in one authority that

recruitment and retention difficulties meant that the council needed to 'grow its own' senior managers.

In the first case, a first bid for Direct Support involved the expansion of existing participation in a local university business school Leadership Programme and the establishment of a middle management development programme. The local university leadership programme is widely subscribed to by neighbouring councils and was thought to provide an ideal opportunity for the sharing of learning and good practice locally, as well as building partnerships with local councils. Subsequently, a second bid for Direct Support was shaped by rigorous evaluation of the programmes participated in through the first bid and through extensive consultation with staff. The result was to expand development activities to a wider group of (150) middle managers against a tailored competency framework.

In the second case, work was guided by an existing Management Development Strategy. Direct Support contributed to elements of the Strategy but the council's own resources were also used. The elements part funded by Direct Support included the establishment of a management competency framework, management development centres, a programme of individual and team coaching and a 'rising stars' programme to allow lower level managers who were identified as having senior management potential to access these management development programmes. The management competency framework was focused on behaviours rather than technical skills (allowing it to have broad relevance across the organisation) and formed the basis for all management training and coaching, appointments and recruitment. Management Development Centres were three day-long sessions, with a heavy emphasis on appraisal and assessment and the development of individualised action plans to overcome any weaknesses identified. The centres were initially designed and delivered by external consultants but part of the contract was to train in-house staff as assessors and trainers to deliver the programme in the future. All senior managers down to 4th tier have now attended these centres. Senior managers were also offered a small amount of individual coaching and a decision has been taken to expand the coaching programme to a wider range of staff. Coaching was also offered to a small number of teams, with sessions focusing on relationships and behaviours between team members, and how these can be improved. Rising stars were able to attend modified management development centres.

Notable features of management development activity were:

- Activity had initially been targeted at senior managers, but had subsequently been expanded to a wider range of middle managers.
- Direct Support funding was used to augment and expand existing programmes of activity at a faster pace and to a wider group of staff funded through mainstream resources.

- Training and development activity had been aligned with organisational needs through consultation with staff, through the establishment of competency frameworks designed to have a wider relevance to recruitment and progression through the organisation.
- Direct Support funding was also used to establish approaches to learning and development among managers that was to be sustained over the long-term, rather than being time-bound and related to the Direct Support funding.

### 5.3.7 Team awards

In one authority team awards were introduced as a result of two considerations. The first was a low level of staff morale, which had been further damaged by negative Corporate Governance Inspection and CPA report. Staff felt demoralised and that examples of genuine good performance was often not recognised by blanket external judgments. Further, it was felt that negative inspections had led to the council having a poor external reputation. The introduction of team awards was intended to recognise good practice, motivate staff to celebrate their achievements and promote a positive external image.

Staff teams nominate themselves for awards in thirteen categories, with other awards being selected by the Chief Executive and Leader. Judges include senior managers and elected members, partner and external representatives. Finalists are selected and invited to a ball style dinner evening, organised at a high profile local venue. All finalists also record a video presentation on the project that they nominated for an award and this is placed on the council intranet so that other teams can benefit from the opportunity to learn from their experiences.

### 5.3.8 Dedicated improvement support

Three of the case studies had appointed some form of dedicated support for improvement activities across a range of areas. In two cases this involved commissioning external consultants to support a range of activities and in the third, Direct Support funding was used to support the recruitment and initial salary and on-costs of appointing a dedicated Improvement Officer.

In one case study a 'change agent' had been commissioned for a period of six months to support a range of improvement activities, described as 'whole council change'. This individual worked alongside officers and members to develop a new senior management structure, reviewed the configuration of back-office support services and assisted the council to implement a new performance management system, making better use of the performance information that they already collected.

In the second, a firm of consultants had been appointed to conduct reviews of a variety of services including Special Education Needs, the customer contact centre, strategic planning and development control. This approach had been intended to prioritise similar types of reform across each of these services, for instance in relation to performance management and other business systems.

In the third authority, a lack of dedicated resource to ensure that projects were implemented across a range of areas had been identified as a barrier to improvement. They thus used Direct Support funding to secure a full-time Improvement Officer and to establish an Improvement Board. The improvement officer is responsible for establishing, updating and delivering the Improvement Plan. The post also offers technical support to project managers and to staff generally in using project management techniques and using the performance management system.

Across the three organisations, it was notable that:

- Dedicated support, even of a time limited nature, was used to both gain specific expertise but also as a means of ensuring that improvement projects could be sustained without falling victim to other pressures on organisational resources.
- This support was and is being used to alter the way that the council operates, with the hope that these changed practices are then sustainable.

### 5.3.9 Procurement

CPA had identified the lack of a procurement strategy in one authority as a major impediment to delivering measurable efficiency savings and service delivery in relation to housing maintenance, cleaning and waste management. The council used Direct Support to employ an external consultant to develop a procurement strategy and support staff through coaching and training to implement this.

In line with the findings of the wider evaluation, CPA was an important trigger and catalyst for improvement activities and for identifying and addressing weaknesses in capacity. Also in line with the wider evaluation the specific capacity gaps to be addressed were around leadership (including the competencies of elected members and senior managers), business systems (such as project and performance management), the capacity of middle managers to use these and organisational culture (particularly confidence and willingness to change and the extent to which business systems in performance or project management were embedded in the organisation).

## 5.4 Other capacity building activities

All the case study authorities were implementing Improvement Plans. As such, a wide range of pre-existing and simultaneous activity was underway in each authority. This covered similar themes to that which was funded by Direct Support. What was noticeable about Direct Support, in contrast to early evidence from the National Programmes case studies, was the extent to which Direct Support activities were an integral part of wider improvement activities. For instance, one case study had an Improvement Plan with six main work themes and Direct Support was funding some of the activities under each. This meant that the authority's own funding would often be utilised to augment Direct Support and vice-a-versa. This meant that there



was a deep level of commitment to those activities that were funded with Direct Support. It also meant that there were plans for many of the activities funded by Direct Support to be sustained after the Direct Support funding had been exhausted.

The council had also made use of several National Programmes, some apparently with financial help from Direct Support. This appeared to have been augmented by subsidies for access to National Programmes, though the precise details of this were unclear. Respondents reported some confusion about the conditions and support available for accessing National Programmes and where they had been made aware of subsidies, this tended to be in an ad-hoc and informal manner while in contact with the IDeA to buy-in member development activity with Direct Support funding. As such, respondents both had difficulty accessing National Programmes, and Direct Support had helped them, indirectly, to overcome some of these.

In this context the concern arises as to the extent of additionality that Direct Support provided. However, in all case studies, respondents reported that Direct Support had been fundamental to enabling the improvement activity to take place. Some respondents reported that Direct Support allowed a much greater scale of activity to take place. This meant that a much wider group of beneficiaries could be reached than would otherwise have been the case. Respondents also reported that this activity could be achieved much quicker because of Direct Support, meaning that its impacts were not only more timely, but they were more significant. The combination of speed and reach meant that a 'critical' mass of training and development could be achieved; systems could be introduced simultaneous to complementary training and awareness raising.

## 5.5 Impact

The qualitative fieldwork included two main themes in relation to impact. The first considered the contribution of the activities developed with Direct Support. Here the focus was on identifying how and why capacity building activities worked. In line with the wider evaluation, the evidence was evaluated at three distinct analytical levels: the individual, teams and departments; and the organisation as a whole. A key line of enquiry related to the ways in which impact at each of these levels could be translated to the others.

This first theme in the fieldwork was useful in developing the overall analysis of capacity building. The second main theme in the fieldwork was to assess the extent to which these outcomes were facilitated (or not) by the particular way in which Direct Support delivered funding and support to local authorities.

### 5.5.1 Impact of Direct Support Funded Activities

#### 5.5.1.1 *Culture change*

The concept of organisational culture is rather ambiguous and difficult to clearly identify. As such, documenting the impact of capacity building activity is difficult. However, it was clear that in the round, capacity building activity was changing the organisational culture of each of the in-depth case study authorities. What was less clear was the extent to which this was achieved as a direct result of those activities funded by Direct Support; there were simply too many variables and potential counterfactuals to ensure that any such attribution was valid. However, what seemed certain was that Direct Support funded activities were playing a significant part in driving these changes.

In case study one, Direct Support was funding activities under the banner of 'whole council change'. There was evidence that the prevailing attitude among staff was less fixed, more open to new ways of thinking and more aware of alternatives being adopted elsewhere. In case study two work that was explicitly badged as 'culture change' had been slow to progress. Direct Support had supported only a small amount of diagnostic support and as such had not yet had much impact in the authority. However, other work undertaken through Direct Support had been able to have a demonstrable effect on the culture of the organisation. For instance, while further progress was needed, work on project management had transformed the culture of the organisation with regard to project planning and delivery. Staff now routinely used the language of project management in the course of their everyday working lives and this was becoming embedded in the way that the organisation operates.

In case study three, there had been a clear attempt to inculcate a culture of 'organisational learning', through the use of a range of training and development activities designed to facilitate shared learning, increased communication and a commitment to continual staff training, development and progression. While there was a recognition of the need to do more to document and share best practice and instances of learning about successful approaches, staff reported an increased willingness to participate in such activities, and several reported that they had overcome their own initial scepticism and were now enthusiastic about this. Generally, staff reported that a range of initiatives, some of which were Direct Support funded, had meant that they were more motivated and that the general working environment was more positive.

In case study four, respondents also reported elements of culture change. For instance, participants reported that those that had participated on the middle managers development programme had a noticeable 'passion for change'. Respondents also reported a much more 'hands-on' leadership style and closer attention from the corporate centre to the delivery of services and a more integrated corporate approach, moving away from 'silo' mentalities. The organisation was also thought to be generally less inward-looking and more willing to look to external relationships as a source of support, ideas and innovation.



### 5.5.1.2 Project management

Capacity building in relation to project management had taken place in two case study authorities. In one case study the impact of activity was thought to be extensive. Individuals had learned new skills and were using these in the workplace. Where individuals had fully adopted project management techniques they felt more confident in managing their projects and were in more control of their workload. They also felt less stressed as a result of formal approaches to managing risk. However, there was a recognition that there was a danger that staff may leave the organisation, diluting the benefits of this individual development for the organisation. As such, project management training was being spread to a wider group of staff. At both team/departmental and authority level there had been a definite impact but progress had been slower and there was a need to ensure that the skills developed in training were actually deployed by a wider group of staff. There was also concern that some aspects of project management techniques were being used more widely than others and it was noted that more needed to be done to embed standardised procedures.

In the other case study, initial work on project management had been generally less successful. Because of the smaller scale of the activities undertaken, the impact had been more about awareness raising and subsequent activity had been commissioned to ensure that specific skills were developed and procedures established. It was this later activity that helped to change the way in which projects were run in the authority rather than the initial Direct Support funded training. However, this initial training was identified with the raising awareness of the capacity building needs of the authority in relation to project management and persuading staff of the desirability of further work in this regard.

The factors that were identified as facilitating organisational change were:

- Making training and development courses a manageable size and duration to enable widespread take-up.
- Stopping short of full blown Prince2 methodology in the majority of cases. Respondents thought that this would have been too intensive for most projects and would have operated as a disincentive for take-up of the training and utilisation of procedures. Differentiation of methodologies for smaller and larger more strategic projects was thought to be useful, with only those managing the latter needing more in-depth Prince2 level training.
- Achieving critical mass was also a factor. Only by familiarising a large group of staff with project management approaches, could procedures be fully adopted. This was true even where staff (and elected members) were not themselves managing projects.
- Because of the different needs of different staff groups there was a need to differentiate training provision with sponsors and elected members needing awareness training and middle managers and project leads needing more in-depth training in specific skills and techniques.

- The ability to tailor the approach to fit with the specific needs of the authority was thought to be beneficial. The type of tailoring needed included to fit with the authority's particular project management procedures, to suit the scale and resources of the organisation (for example, some smaller district councils may be less likely to need widespread Prince2 level provision, whereas some larger authorities are more likely to need a wider group of staff with this level of competency). Other ways in which tailoring is important related to timing and to course duration.

### 5.5.1.3 Visioning and priorities

The impact of visioning and priorities work in both of the in-depth case studies that had used Direct Support for this type of activity, was clear. In both organisations, the output - the statement of priorities for the organisation – was being clearly being used to guide the direction of the organisation. In one authority, this statement helped to identify further capacity building needs that became the subject of further bids for Direct Support. In the other, demonstrable progress was being made in the alignment of the corporate plan and service delivery plans with these priorities. While the need for further progress was openly acknowledged, there was evidence that organisational resources were beginning to be aligned with its priorities. It was noted that this would take time, but it was reported that staff now found it easier to identify areas of activity that lay outside these priority areas and therefore found it easier also to avoid resources being dissipated in these areas.

Work on developing sustainable and effective organisational priorities was successful where:

- Substantial agreement on the part of political leadership could be obtained. This included cross-party agreement and where this was the case, staff could be more certain that the investment of time, energy and resources in pursuit of agreed priorities would be worthwhile over the longer-term because of a reduced fear of uncertainty.
- Resources and service plans were aligned with organisational priorities, making them 'real', rather than 'espoused'.
- Where these priorities were well understood by all staff and where the linkages between these and 'the everyday job' were clear.

### 5.5.1.4 Development of political systems and structures

In both authorities where work on member development was particularly focused on ensuring that modernised political structures were working more effectively, the impact of Direct Support funded work was to markedly improve their operation.

In one authority, work on strengthening Overview and Scrutiny functions was successful in transforming its focus. Whereas the previous situation had been random and ad-hoc scrutiny activities with a heavy emphasis on looking outside the organisation, the situation now is markedly different. The overview and scrutiny committee has an agreed forward work plan

which is aligned with the council calendar, meaning that scrutiny forms a much more integrated part of the council decision making procedure. A framework has been established for undertaking scrutiny reviews and a small number of committee members have learned useful skills and built their confidence in supporting an IDeA consultant to lead a scrutiny review of the Local Strategic Partnership. While members are more engaged than previously with the work of the committee, it was recognised that further work needed to be done to ensure member engagement.

In the other authority where member development activity was targeted partly at strengthening the role of scrutiny mixed messages emerged as to the impacts. On the one hand, committee chairs who had attended Overview and Scrutiny training with the IDeA reported that they thought that there had been little impact on them and that they had little enthusiasm for applying any skills learned in their role as chairs of scrutiny. However, a recent inspection had given positive feedback on the role of scrutiny in the authority. This was attributed to a better general understanding of the role of scrutiny in the authority and to the confidence of some elected members, those that had attended the Leadership Academy, rather than those that had attended Overview and Scrutiny training.

The development of political structures was effective where:

- Elected members could see the benefits of change and were able to commit to these. Acceptance of the need for reform was a first step in this direction.
- The benefits of new ways of working could be demonstrated, either through learning from other councils or from 'learning by doing'.
- Where development activity could be made sustainable, through integrating it into the mainstream and planned activity of the organisation in the future.

#### *5.5.1.5 Development of elected members*

A variety of initiatives were being used across the case studies in relation to the training and development of elected members, including participation in National Programmes like the Leadership Academy.

Generally IDeA programmes for elected members were thought to have had a positive impact. Those individuals that had attended the Leadership Academy were generally very positive about their experience and reported significant individual level impacts such as increased motivation and the development of new leadership skills that they had been able to use in their role as councillors, and specifically as executive members. Participants also welcomed the chance to build networks and to gain from the experiences of other networks. In one authority, participation on the Leadership Academy was thought to have helped to develop strategic priorities and to begin the process of embedding these in the structure of the organisation. However, organisational impact was thought to be impeded in another authority where only one or two members attended the Leadership Academy. If a larger number of executive or other members had been able to attend,

organisational impact would have been much more significant. Participation on the IDeA's Overview and Scrutiny training programme was thought to be successful by officers at one authority in strengthening Overview and Scrutiny, but one participant reported that it was less successful. However, this feedback came from only a small number of respondents and should not therefore be used to develop general judgements about this programme.

The development of competency frameworks for elected members was thought to have generally raised the profile of member training and development and as a result of member development activity, most case studies reported that individual elected members were more competent.

Overall, the mixture of councillor development activity had led to organisational benefits. There was a general sense of increased cross party working, with the authority benefiting from increased stability in political leadership as a result, meaning that long-term planning, investment and strategising was more possible. Where newly elected members received training this was generally reported to have helped to smooth the transitional period. Case studies were also now more aware of the potential problems associated with large-scale changes in leadership and as a result most had improved induction systems for elected members, again providing evidence of the increased importance placed on issues of member training and helping to ensure that increased stability in transitional periods is a sustained impact of Direct Support investment.

Councillor training and development was successful where:

- Councillors were able to understand the need for individual development and valued this enough to invest in it. Cross party agreement on the desirability of councillor development helped to ensure successful and sustainable investment.
- Initial activities could be mainstreamed, for instance into sustainable induction systems, skills audits and competency frameworks. This helps to ensure that the benefits of investment are retained in the organisation, even where there are large scale changes in the make up of the council.
- Councillors appreciated the opportunity to learn from elsewhere, build networks and open their perspectives to new and alternative ways of doing things.
- A balance between cross-party and single party training helped both to build increased political stability and to offer opportunities to be more open about potential weaknesses.
- Sufficient numbers of elected members undertook development activity to make it effective and overcome barriers to organisational change.

#### **5.5.1.6 Management development**

The types of management development activity underway varied between the two authorities where Direct Support was being used for this purpose.

In one authority management development formed a large part of their Improvement activities overall. In this authority a management development

competency framework had been established and this was clearly well embedded in the authority, with a wide range of respondents identifying with it and addressing management and leadership issues in ways which were clearly influenced by the framework. Certainly, it was used as a central part of the recruitment and progression system of the council. The competency framework also formed the basis for training and development activity, including the use of management development centres. Participants on these centres were universally positive about their experience and they noted demonstrable positive impacts on them as individuals as well as the ways in which they had been able to change their workplace behaviour, influencing not just other staff but the ways in which their teams and the whole organisation operates. Beneficial individual impacts included increased confidence and workplace effectiveness. Crucially, the management development centres had encouraged participants to share the benefits of their learning and this was widely reported to be happening, though it was recognised that this was not as systematic as it might be. The authority was using assessment and appraisal profiles of managers gained through the centres to form a staff competencies database which was then used to staff project teams with individuals with complementary skills and competencies. There was some evidence that this was taking place and even that 'rising star' participants had been recruited to project teams as a result, helping to give further experience and encouragement to 'future leaders'.

The authority had also used both individual and team coaching. Again, both were thought to be helpful and individuals reported positive impacts such as increased confidence and ability to engage with others more effectively. Again, participants had shared the benefits of their learning with others and a commonly expressed desire was to expand the availability of coaching to wider group of staff and for existing recipients to be able to access more.

In another authority, 150 middle managers had undertaken a development programme. This had allowed them to develop a wider understanding the context for the service area in which they worked. They reported increased understanding of central government initiatives such as the LGMA, theories of change management and financial management models. They reported that they had increased motivation as a result and that this had spilled over into increased innovation among this staff group. Senior managers had also participated in a leadership programme run by a local university business school. This had included a work-based assignment and respondents reported organisational benefits as deriving from this. Senior managers who have been through the programme are included in a network in the authority to try and develop peer-support mechanisms. Generally, management development activity funded through Direct Support has helped to raise the profile and recognition of the importance of management development in the authority. Senior management has now 'bought into' this with one example being a Strategic Mentoring programme being established between the Chief Executive and a pool of ten low-level managers with senior management potential.

Management development activity was successful where:

- Sufficient numbers of individuals had received training as to reach a 'critical mass' able to achieve organisational change.
- Management training was integrated with wider organisational systems such as for progression and appraisal.
- Individuals were encouraged to share the benefits of their learning and development with a wider group of staff. Systematic processes to ensure this happens were also beneficial.
- Systems were in place to ensure that the benefits of individual development could be harnessed. Examples of this included the establishment of a database of staff who had undergone particular development or had specific skills which could then be used to staff project teams.
- Individual development was celebrated and highlighted as core to the organisation's purpose – part of its culture – rather than an added extra with little link to organisational development.

#### 5.5.1.7 *Team awards*

Only one authority had implemented this type of initiative. In this authority evidence of the impact of the scheme was not fully conclusive, but did suggest that at least some of its objectives were being met. Interviews with project coordinators and with award recipients did indicate that the scheme inculcated a sense of pride and achievement and increased motivation. The number of entries for awards had risen markedly, providing some evidence of the wider importance of the scheme for the authority. However, the extent to which teams were able to share and learn from award winners was less clear, as was the impact on the authority's external reputation.

The key features of this scheme appeared to be:

- The esteem which the authority places on the awards, with the commitment of the Chief Executive, Leader and cabinet being key.
- The level of investment in the event needed to be sufficient to ensure that the awards and the presentation evening were seen as serious and credible. However, the authority was also conscious of possible external criticism of this investment and was seeking external sponsorship as a means of offsetting such criticism
- The participation of external bodies as partners in teams entering projects for the awards as well as on judging panels helped to fulfil the objective of presenting the council positively to an external audience.
- The opportunity to capture successful ways of working and to share these more widely was also key to the success of the scheme, though take-up of these opportunities also had to be secured.

#### 5.5.1.8 *Dedicated improvement support*

Case study authorities had taken very different approaches to the organisation of dedicated improvement support. However, similar benefits were thought to have arisen from it. Dedicated support for improvement was thought to be helpful in driving improvement activities and maintaining momentum. In all cases the individual or firm involved were able to bring new skills and enthusiasm and they were able to support the development

of others and enable them to develop improved systems and working methods. In one case it was thought to be important that the individual(s) involved were external. While in another the dedicated staffing resource was in-house the individual concerned had only recently joined the authority and had an atypical background in the private sector, meaning that again, new skills and approaches were brought to the authority. The additional benefits of an external voice were thought to be the additional credibility and legitimacy. In two of the case studies dedicated resources for improvement officers had been subsumed into mainstream budgets and in a third, the initial role of external consultants had been expanded to other services. In one case substantial savings were claimed as a result of the work enabled through Direct Support.

#### 5.5.1.9 Procurement

Work to develop a procurement strategy in one authority had been able to progress this much faster than if Direct Support had not been available. The demonstrable impact was the establishment of a procurement strategy and implementation of staff training in support of it.

## 5.6 General impact of Direct Support

The specific role of Direct Support was also considered through the qualitative fieldwork with respondents and documentary analysis. Direct Support was thought to enable positive impacts for a variety of reasons:

- The bidding process for Direct Support helped to concentrate improvement activities on organisational development initiatives.
- The capacity to tailor interventions to meet specific local needs.
- The scale of resources available allowed a level of activity to be developed which could have a significant impact on the organisation.
- Training and development activities could reach a 'critical mass' of officers and members, helping to facilitate organisational change.
- The context in which Direct Support was delivered meant that the need for improvement had been accepted and the organisation had already decided to commit significant resources on improvement activities. Direct Support helped to deliver this programme of improvement activity. This also meant that Direct Support was integrated with the broader development of the organisation in a coordinated manner.
- The context also meant that improvement activity had significant senior management support.
- Because Direct Support bids had to be approved externally, the activities that flowed from them had a level of additional credibility and legitimacy as a result.
- Direct Support helped to fund activities that opened the authorities up to external and alternative ideas and ways of doing things.



## 5.7 Evidence from 'lighter' touch case studies

Qualitative data generated as part of the lighter touch case studies supports earlier emerging findings which suggested that Direct Support activities were an integral part of improvement activities, and therefore fundamental to enabling improvement to take place. Though (as already suggested in the emerging findings documents) the concept of organisational culture is difficult to clearly identify, evidence from the lighter touch case studies provides further evidence of a 'cultural' shift taking place within authorities. The use of skills and knowledge from Direct Support to shape future activities has thus created the opportunity to 'move' the culture of authorities and embed organisational change. The benefits of national capacity building programmes, such as the 4Ps were integral to this.

Arguably, Direct Support has been a facilitator for activities and development within authorities giving them the 'capacity' to tailor interventions to meet specific local needs.



## 6 Conclusions

Despite its limitations, context analysis comparing changes in CPA ratings over a period of time against take-up of Direct Support suggests that there is a correlation between use of Direct Support and improvement. This data on its own, however, cannot support any attribution of causality. Qualitative research in a small number of in-depth case study authorities and evidence from the lighter touch case studies suggests that there may be some causality between take-up of Direct Support and improvement.

Evidence from both the in-depth qualitative and lighter touch case studies suggests that Direct Support had clearly been influential as a means of delivering improvement activity. The work funded through Direct Support had helped to improve capacity at individual, team/department and organisational levels. There were widespread reports from respondents in these case studies – both direct beneficiaries and individuals with an overview of the authority – that the ‘culture’ of the organisation was changing, becoming more focused on improvement, more committed to ongoing development of staff and systems and more open to looking at a range of options. In supporting councillor development, in particular, Direct Support had facilitated training and development which promoted acceptance of and commitment to the modernisation agenda and increased political stability in terms of investment in organisational and staff development.

Direct Support was so successful in facilitating organisational change and improvement because of the context within which it was delivered, the scale of activity that it enabled and the degree to which it could be integrated with the authorities’ specific improvement needs. In particular, Direct Support was used to support plans designed by the organisation itself. As a result, the activities funded by Direct Support received the full commitment of the organisation. There was thus a general commitment from senior management level down to ensure that these activities succeeded (for instance in terms of take-up) and that the organisation took full advantage of them, including by being able to make changes as a result of them. Direct Support activities also focused simultaneously on improving systems and on improving the ability of staff to work within them. There was also evidence of conscious attempts to facilitate the translation of individual to organisational development and vice-a-versa. It thus facilitated capacity building at both an individual and organisational level concurrently. The scale of intervention meant that a critical mass of development activity could take place. For instance, management training was able to reach a sufficient number of managers at any particular level to promote group as opposed to individual change.

Work taken forward through Direct Support was broadly similar in content to that developed in the National Programmes and Improvement

Partnerships. However, Direct Support work was more rapid and focused than that enabled through Improvement Partnerships and was of a significantly more extensive scale than that enabled via the National Programmes alone. That said, Direct Support had served as a means of accessing National Programmes on a wider scale than would otherwise have been the case. The expanded scale of take-up enabled through Direct Support allowed these programmes to have a much more significant impact than if just one or two individuals had been able to access them.

## 7 References

Nunn, Alex (2006), *Initial Scoping of Direct Support in Poor and Weak Local Authorities and Summary of Baseline Findings in Improvement Partnerships*, Unpublished note to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Local Government Association.

# 8 Appendix A: Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

## March 2004 – December 2005

Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities	
Region (names of councils removed)	Description
EAST MIDLANDS	
	<p>A programme of work focusing on three areas – further improvement of the council in the centre (concentrating on the council's preparation for CPA), increasing the council's capacity to deliver its strategic housing agenda and increasing the capacity of the council's elected members.</p> <p>A further bid to address the development of officer and member capacity, with the aim of encouraging the council to visit and learn from best practice authorities elsewhere. An improvement board will also be established.</p>
	<p>An improvement programme to be provided by IDeA focusing on political and managerial leadership, performance management, internal and external communication and supplemented with some project work on organisational development.</p>
	<p>The proposal identifies the need for Strategic Management, People Management, User Involvement &amp; Diversity and Equality. The council is also attempting to establish innovative ways of working with high performing upper tier authorities.</p> <p>A second bid covers various themes included supporting member development through reviewing current structures and arrangements and developing members through training programmes. Leadership and staff capacity will also be addressed through training programmes, "away-days", and ensuring front line customer service staff are accredited with an NVQ in customer care.</p>

## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

### Region (names of councils removed) Description

Partnership with a London borough to jointly pilot Virtual Network Analysis – a process for assessing and improving partnership working. This is to be used to evaluate effectiveness of the Local Strategic Partnership.

A second bid looks more closely at the improvement needs of the council, particularly performance management, developing members and ensuring effective procurement.

There is a need for the council to move away from the narrowly defined service blocks to a senior management structure that provides consistent strategic direction and management across the council. This third bid will assist with this by developing and implementing a senior manager structure, driven by sound performance management processes, and consulting with Trade Unions, members and employees as required. In addition, a Change Agent will be appointed to assist in delivering the step change.

This bid is for continuing development of all members of the council, including development of the overview and scrutiny function and providing peer support across all political groups.

Three initiatives 1) A small “raising members awareness” training and scoping of member development needs. 2) An externalised restructuring and recruitment exercise by HR consultants 3) Performance Management training, and a computerised performance monitoring and management system.

Financial appraisal to be carried out to look for differences in expenditure as compared to other councils.

A second bid is to specifically carry out 1) a structure review which will make recommendations on how to restructure the council to better align resources to the strategic priorities. This review will engage members, managers, unions and employees. 2) Project and programme management and 3) a member development programme. A third bid is for the continuation and finalisation of the structure review.

Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities	
Region (names of councils removed)	Description
	<p>The first bid consists of two strands linking to the council's improvement plan – in project and performance management.</p> <p>A second bid brings together both this county and the county town to look at joint competency frameworks in the leadership and management areas. They will roll out training for leaders and managers in both organisations, create toolkits, ensure in house trainers can provide the training to it can then be taken to the other districts.</p>
	<p>A peer review audit of the progress in implementing improvement plans in response to CPA and the 'Gearing Up' programme.</p>
EAST of ENGLAND	
	<p>Additional funding for two pilot projects to support the roll out of a countywide procurement strategy and a change management programme.</p> <p>Capacity building support required for a total organisational change programme entitled Transforming the county. The funding will ensure specific provision is made for officer leadership in the form of a management development programme; developing Member leadership through establishment of a new member induction package and community engagement; and support for a transitional team to roll out these development activities and devise internal communications so that knowledge and ownership of the change programme filters throughout the organisation.</p>
	<p>A range of measures that will address the themes of the recovery plan. The majority of the bid will go towards strategic management; strengthening member and senior officers' strategic decision making, integration of project streams and senior officer and middle manager events. Further funds will go towards performance management, including "critical friend" mentoring, and improvement planning.</p>

### Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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	A menu of different measures to be taken under two sections of the improvement plan – developing corporate context and corporate capacity. The measures will include appointing a CPA programme change manager, providing risk management awareness training. The bulk of the funding will go towards provision of in house skills based training linking to national programmes and Regional Centres where appropriate.
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	Funding required to assist with three key strands to the council's improvement programme – leadership, corporate capacity and improved service delivery. Work will involve a leadership training programme, development of a new corporate strategy and options appraisal for delivery of services.
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	The Member development aspect of a wider Developing Leadership Together plan is put forward for funding here. Members will be encouraged to look at how they can input into wider leadership work as well as their role in the community, in service improvement etc by creating induction plans and then participating in activity.
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	Three strands identified for support: achieving service transformation by partnering with a large private firm, producing an integrated accommodation strategy (help the council manage its assets better) and procuring for a new leisure centre. Within these, there are clear plans for transferring learning across other service areas.
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	This work will support specific aspects of the council's improvement plan that includes programme management, community leadership and engagement, and effective strategic planning. Funding will go towards the costs of training, coaching, and workshops for officers and members. In addition, support will be provided for the costs of an interim programme manager who will ensure all activities are co-ordinated and delivered effectively.
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Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities	
Region (names of councils removed)	Description
LONDON	
	This will fund the second phase of a project to increase the leadership and managerial capacity of middle managers. The programme will focus on self-analysis of current management styles and development of action plans to broaden and focus on improvement.
	This is a bid for support in four areas and will fund the creation of a learning library for all staff, a performance indicator database, training for NVQ assessors and support for 3rd and 4th tier managers to be supplied by the IDeA.
	The Forward programme is already established, but this bid is aimed at extending existing leadership programme to 4th & 5th tier managers, further developing the coaching, mentoring and action learning programmes, opening junior management programmes up to the voluntary sector and to build in standards of accreditation.
	This bid identifies 6 areas of work covering the design and management of programmes for Members, Head's of Service and Senior Management Leaders, the improvement of Project Management Capacity and Capability, support for the Community Leadership role of Members, and to introduce peer challenge into key areas, enabling the council to learn from good practices in other councils.
	The sum approved is to support the borough's Improvement Programme. It includes focus on Customer and User satisfaction, Improved Services & Performance, Governance & Infrastructure, Vision and Community Planning.
	Support is requested for three discrete areas - leadership development by rolling out the existing leadership programme further, enabling effective management of the programme office and managing individuals performance with new appraisal system.



## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

### Region (names of councils removed) Description

The council requires tactical support and interventions to support investment by the council in three specific areas: supporting leadership & cross cultural change; addressing the Gershon agenda and supporting the council in improving services to children in partnership with others.

This bid is for four discrete pieces of work around Customer Focus, Contestability, Community Partnerships and Managerial Leadership. These are all integrated into the programme – an improvement plan that the council has itself committed resource to.

The first bid was for some consultancy work around recruitment and retention.  
The second covers a programme of commissioning external expertise in business process reengineering, management training and identification of how the authority should develop its Organisational Development function to drive cultural change.  
The third bid is for mentoring support for cabinet members and development for the management board through coaching sessions and team building. Further funding has been committed to continue member peer support that has already brought benefit to the council.  
Lastly, funding has been approved for the council's BIG project where a training and development programme will be commissioned, designed and rolled out to frontline staff and junior managers with the aim of transforming customer services.

### NORTH EAST

A three strand bid to look at member development (the council has a mix of new councillors and a large proportion of independent councillors) and project management. The project management will be specifically to look at how small councils can improve practice – it will be delivered jointly with a neighbouring DC and could inform future work with Districts.

## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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A bid to support the creation of an internal improvement team, including back-filling posts and providing external consultancy. The team will initially be involved in putting together a detailed action plan and, once agreed, will monitor progress. In addition the team will focus on strategic planning, organisational development and service improvement.

A bid to support the council's key priorities of strategic management, people management, user involvement and diversity and equalities. The programmes will help inform the longer-term strategy for improvement in district councils. The main strand of this funding will go towards the continuing costs of the council's improvement team plus costs associated with organisational development, including commissioning an organisational change contract and the appointment of an organisational development officer. Smaller sums support funding for member development.

This bid is for two priority areas in the council – improving member development and introducing and implementing a competency framework for council officers. A second bid will support the recruitment of an Organisation Development Adviser to help deliver the council's management development programme over a four year programme.

Corporate Performance Action Plan recommends three different measures. CB Funding is for the second of these – Member Development. The 2nd bid is for the work to be delivered jointly with Berwick upon Tweed. Additional funding for two further bids. First for the costs of an interim HR manager while the permanent HR manager delivers activities relating to the organisational development and communications programme. Second bid to improve the financial management of the council and improve strategic decision making.

## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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### NORTH WEST

The council is seeking funding for two key elements of the improvement programme: These are an intensive development programme for members, to be delivered through a learning partnership with another CC and facilitated by IDEA, and a performance management programme for middle management.

Eight themes have been identified in this bid to improve and develop the overall managerial structure

- 1) Facilitation and challenge for Member/Officer discussions on developing priorities and action plans
- 2) Facilitation on managerial, leadership and organisational development
- 3) Performance audit of the Medium Term Financial Strategy
- 4) Peer mentoring
- 5) Developing community linkages via specialist input on local needs analysis
- 6) Member development programme on partnership working
- 7) Access to specialist HR expertise to establish corporate ownership and embed the developed HR policies
- 8) Facilitation to support the existing impetus for change and embed a performance and risk management culture.

This bid for a Leadership programme will cater for all 51 elected members, the 12 officers in the management team and 25 middle managers. Suppliers will provide an integrated programme of development over a period of time rather than a series of training events.

This package is to help build links between local higher education institutions and local government improvement. The pilot will explore how using local establishments can drive forward improvement in the council and at the same time boost local business or non-profit organisations.

Additional funding for a range of proposals to assist the authority to move forward with its improvement. This bid provides an to pilot different improvement approaches for district councils.

Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities	
Region (names of councils removed)	Description
	<p>Joint bid that has 4 different strands (1) creating diagnostic tools for leadership and management development (2) improving the capacity of front line staff to better respond to customer expectations (3) joint training programme, involving member and managers, to make engagement work at a local level (4) achieving service transformation through replication of Salford's "bubble strategy". This strategy that was used to transform the authority's benefits service by defining pre-conditions for success, and ensure staff were skilled in business analysis, organisational development and continual improvement techniques.</p>
	<p>Three modules of the Aiming for Excellence programme are being supported – these are in Management Development, Culture Change and in conducting a review of Human Resources. A small amount is for project management and monitoring.</p>
	<p>A change programme encompassing 5 key strands of modernisation: transformational leadership, partnership working, leadership/management development, performance improvement and improved business systems and processes.</p> <p>A second bid focusing on building capacity in the political executive and middle management. New members will be supported by a mentoring programme and tailored workshops. Specific programmes will be delivered by a Business School for middle managers.</p>
	<p>This bid is for the development of an outward facing, customer-centred organisation. Funding will also go towards a programme of member development, focusing on leadership. Learning opportunities will be varied; ranging from mentoring to workshops and including reviewing the Cabinet and Scrutiny functions of the council.</p>

## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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### SOUTH EAST

A retrospective bid for work that had already been completed as part of an initiative to design a new organisational structure, reviewing the role of the new top team, directors and councillors. This was accompanied by an internal communications activity, a new performance management system, project management training and sharing of learning events.

Funding to address key enabling activities that provide the foundation for improvement across the whole organisation. Capacity will be developed in 5 key areas – strategic leadership and learning; performance improvement; governance; continuous improvement; developing efficient and cost effective services. These areas will be developed by strengthened business policies and processes and by clear learning – including development of leaders, members and top teams.

Funding for a range of target inputs to support the Council's CPA Recovery Plan, including funding for an improvement board, partnership working and for a middle management development programme.

Bid to support a programme of work focused on change management at both member and officer level. Direct outcomes include consensus and clarity of roles and responsibilities; and effective working relationships.

Funding for consultancy support for development control.

Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities	
Region (names of councils removed)	Description
SOUTH WEST	
	<p>Small bid to supplement the development of a high quality, properly costed Improvement Plan with defined milestones and outcomes, and a further substantial capacity building bid to support the delivery of the improvement plan.</p> <p>Funding will support staff training and consultancy costs with the focus on three key areas linked to the council's corporate plan: delivery of customer centred services; delivery of high quality cost effective services; and enhanced effectiveness of council staff and councillors.</p>
	<p>A bid over a two year period to fund middle management training, and work to be carried out on improvements for performance management and strategic planning.</p>
	<p>Funding to support a comprehensive Member development programme, a change programme for officers – addressing the culture and capacity of the organisation and funds to support an improvement programme to enhance and develop customer focus.</p>
	<p>Funding to assist the council's "Human Resource Management and Organisational Culture" Programme, including the implementation of a people strategy, completion of a management training programme, implementation of workforce remodelling, and development of effective recruitment and performance monitoring systems.</p>
	<p>As part of the Stepping Up programme the council already have in place, this bid is specifically to embed project &amp; performance management, developing and adopting a communications strategy, creating a reward structure for staff and to re-engineer business processes.</p>
	<p>This proposal is to address areas identified in the CPA. It has four broad themes: Leadership and Management Development; Human Resources; Performance Management &amp; Improvement Planning and Capacity Building to improve service delivery.</p>

## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
	<p>The first bid is to develop a cross-directorate development programme for 'Professional' Managers. The focus will be assessment against a set of management competencies, personal development and development of people management skills. The second bid covers eight themes. 1) Supporting organisational change and development – through learning and development of front line staff, member training, and improving communication. 2) Developing a Children's Service that supports principles of Every Child Matters through project management and engagement of stake-holders 3) Securing improvement through achieving savings &amp; efficiencies via action plans and the establishment of cross working 4) Supporting the development of a housing strategy 5) Embedding Risk Management through training and development of guidance 6) Enhancing corporate asset management systems 7) Embedding a Procurement Strategy 8) Facilitating a proactive approach to diversity.</p>
	<p>Support for the council to enable it to deliver its recovery and improvement plan. The focus will be on effective planning, implementing a performance management system, implementing a strategy for communications, improving customer service skills and looking at restructuring the organisation. A smaller sum was allocated to the council for interim Chief Executive support.</p>
	<p>Council has identified 2 intentions – a unit has been set up to deliver on the first of these, which is to address the growing socio-economic imbalances. Admin support is required for this. Funding is also requested for development of project management system and for a performance management framework to be embedded throughout the council.</p>

Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities	
Region (names of councils removed)	Description
	<p>This bid is to allow the authority to manage the initial process of identifying its needs and ensuring long term sustained change. The bid has 3 strands.</p> <p>1) Securing commitment for change, ensuring managers secure ownership and understand the change management agenda</p> <p>2) Support for development of the change programme, including project managing improvement planning and ensuring the process, and subsequent change, takes place in a timely and effective manner and project</p> <p>3) Supporting Members via training and development of systems and tools.</p>
WEST MIDLANDS	
	<p>This is a programme to improve the ability of the council to adopt and become familiar with a modernised financial regulation framework. It will consist of an 'Ask Jeeves' type facility where staff can interrogate the rules online and a supporting training programme being developed by a seconded accountant.</p>
	<p>A series of programme initiatives designed to significantly enhance capacity to make improvements quickly and in ways that are sustainable over the coming years.</p> <p>1) Management Development for 40 council officers – leadership and change management will be on the programme</p> <p>2) Top team development, including members and all other teams – service-based, cross-service, professional and managerial</p> <p>3) Business Process Change</p> <p>4) Learning – Includes facilitation of a series of activities including benchmarking, learning labs, networking and other ways of expanding knowledge management</p> <p>5) Member Development – linking to other organisational development projects and to the need to develop overview &amp; scrutiny roles</p> <p>6) Provide 'fast-track' learning for the current Personnel Officer and procure 'backfill' to enable this to happen</p> <p>7) Employee Reward and Recognition</p> <p>8) Purchase expertise and resource to carry out a full Training Needs Analysis for all employees and members.</p>



### Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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	<p>This work focuses on building strategic capacity at member and senior officer level so that they can manage change and develop corporate leadership. The aim is also to enhance the skills of middle management. Training, development and support will be delivered, under four themes of developing management and leadership capacity, project management, member development and strengthening corporate capacity.</p>
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	<p>The authority is focusing on 3 key areas: 1) improvement of service delivery 2) improvement of strategic decision making 3) embedding a performance management culture. It aims to do this via development of members, top teams and managers and through a programme of performance management.</p>
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	<p>Three strands of work now merged into two: 1) New ways of developing skills for operational service staff to continue the improving customer services initiative 2) Corporate Culture Change – leadership and better team working for higher level officers; more professional development planning for middle managers and more leadership training for cabinet members. This has been merged with item 3. 3) Monitoring to Manage Performance – promoting better use of data across the council to help measure and demonstrate change.</p>
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	<p>A small pilot to test the use of 'Mythodrama'. The approach uses a unique synthesis of arts-based experimental learning focused on theatre skills, psychology, mythology, and organisational development. The impact of this unique method of training will be evaluated and may be used to inform the development of a national programme.</p>
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## Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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The authority also has two additional capacity building programmes: one, a management development strategy targeting recruitment, induction, appraisal, and development and another to support 4 projects – Building Partnerships with Trade Unions, Recruitment & Retention – Managing Diversity including facilitating a programme with the Muslim community; Support for Improvement and Leadership & Middle Management Development.

### YORKSHIRE & HUMBER

Member development costs to support the engagement strategy currently being implemented in Hull. A second bid encompasses more member work which will be facilitated by IDEa.

The Minister approved funding for NE Lincs to enable the interim finance team to put in place a deliverable budget for 2004/05 and close the accounts for 2002/03. Some funding is for a management conference which will promote and utilise the management competency framework in managing delivery and developing performance.

Two joint bids were submitted: 1st bid to improve Corporate Capacity, Governance and Service but using case studies in ALMO, Leisure services and Adult services with clear strategy for transferring learning. 2nd bid to improve corporate capacity, member development and enhance management, including Workforce Diversity and Improvement Planning.

The focus of this bid is on member development. There are supporting strands in reviewing the senior management structure currently in place, launching the improvement plan, putting in place a management development programme and developing the community leadership role.

### Summary of Direct Support to Poor and Weak Authorities

Region (names of councils removed)	Description
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	<p>This is funding for work undertaken prior to the 1st of August 2003. This support package concentrates on developing management and elected members. Activities included introducing the EFQM Excellence model into service improvement, developing a self assessment tool and 'Scrutiny Driver' support tool. IDeA also provided leadership training and supported the needs of elected members.</p>
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Regional Support/Improvement Partnerships	
Region/Sub region	Description
EASTERN ENGLAND	
East of England Regional Assembly	<p>First bid is to develop services already provided by the body, to provide greater depth in services (e.g. In follow up), to use new methods for delivering training (making use of IDeA's e-learning tool) and establishing network support groups to take forward strands of improvement individually e.g. in Performance management.</p> <p>A second bid is to fund the provision of an MSc in town planning in East of England Region. Course format will be via a mixture of day release and live web base links thus being more accessible to those staff who are unable to travel away from home.</p>
Essex Personnel Officers Forum	<p>This bid is for the establishment of a development centre approach to improving the skills of personnel officers. It will enforce partnership working, implement changes recommended by CPA, understand and provide solutions on topics specific to Essex Community Engagement, Recruitment, Regeneration, Community Engagement and Equality &amp; Diversity.</p> <p>Further funding approved of to allow 8 additional participants to benefit from the opportunity for skills and expertise to be developed and shared across a range of authorities.</p>
Suffolk Leadership Programme	<p>A bid that centres on leadership development for officers and members in Suffolk, its Districts and LSP partners. A baseline study will be carried out and will inform the development of gateway training sessions and activities. It will take in findings of the P&amp;W strategy and incorporate the existing fast track leadership schemes. LGLC colleagues will be working with the lead council, St. Edmundsbury DC.</p>
EAST MIDLANDS	
CIPFA in East Midlands	<p>The pilot aims to tackle the problem in one professional area (accountancy) on a regional basis and thereby lessen the risks, the commitment of time and resources, and the financial burden to individual authorities.</p>

Regional Support/Improvement Partnerships	
Region/Sub region	Description
EMRLGA	<p>To develop a range of new training modules to enhance EMRLGA's existing Member Development Programme. New modules will be developed specifically to meet the needs of the Region's Members, including specific provision for newly elected Members for example Understanding the Region, Equalities and CPA.</p> <p>Funding to create a small unit to develop and apply organisational development techniques arising out of Virtual Network Analysis. This is a group of techniques designed to improve collaborative or partnership working between organisations whether in the public private or Community and Voluntary sectors.</p>
Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership	<p>Initial funding to enable the improvement partnership to put programme managers in place to commence work on three key areas: member development; middle management development; and embedding performance management. An additional request for funding will be made once measurable outcomes for the partnership have been identified.</p>
LONDON	
Association of London Government (various lead councils)	<p>Six separate strands, which serve to address the key improvement needs in London that were identified through extensive consultation. They are 1) Networking for senior managers 2) Regional training programme to address key skills gaps 3) HR Improvement Programme 4) a pan London local government recruitment portal makeadifference.gov.uk 5) Improved Scrutiny 6) New routes into work to encourage young and minority groups into local government.</p>
Capital Ambition	<p>This funding will support the costs of a scoping exercise, that will seek to provide the basis for taking forward concrete proposals in the London area such as a "Talent Bank" for sharing people between authorities, peer review mechanisms and a shared performance information and research facility.</p>

Regional Support/Improvement Partnerships	
Region/Sub region	Description
NORTH EAST	
North East Council Improvement Network (NECIN)	<p>£300k for the regional network to support Districts post CPA, leadership for members, whole council change and Equality &amp; Diversity. Will be consulting Fire, Police and National Parks Services.</p> <p>The funding will go towards a clear set of activities under each of the key themes identified in the improvement strategy: building capacity; improving leadership skills; improving service delivery; developing workforce capacity; improving community engagement and wellbeing; and improving the region's prosperity and sustainability.</p>
NORTH WEST	
North West Learning Network	This network will be providing the basis of a longer-term regional partnership in the NW. This bid is for a scoping study that will produce the design for governance, operation and evaluation of the Network. Scoping study will involve the Police, Fire and National Parks Services.
North West Improvement Network	The central principle of the North West Improvement Network is to create a network of local authorities and other partners in the region committed to mutual improvement. A regional capacity building strategy for the North West commits the Network to clear objectives around supporting organisational learning, poor and weak rated councils and clear governance arrangements. The NWIN will procure a central 'hub' of expertise. The hub will assist all NW councils in creating Learning Plans and will help deliver on those plans.

Regional Support/Improvement Partnerships	
Region/Sub region	Description
SOUTH EAST	
East Sussex Joint Improvement Project	The project will be undertaken by all 5 districts and the county council in East Sussex and focuses on joint service improvement. Funding will mainly be for a project team and consultants to drive this work forward. The specific procurement training required for this project will be undertaken by the SE Regional Centre of Excellence. Funding of £60K is included in this amount for the mid Sussex training consortium.
Kent Districts Improvement Club	This improvement club is a collaboration of all 12 Kent District Councils. This funding is for the first phase of work to be undertaken including the setting up a project management team who will be involved in the programme co-ordination and commissioning of activities in the partnership. Funding will also focus on the support for the 3 weak authorities, specifically targeting their priorities and focusing on key issues.
SOUTH WEST	
Devon Improvement Partnership	A sub regional group consisting of all 8 Devon Districts, Torbay, Plymouth, the Devon Fire Service and a National Park Authority. The focus is on building partnerships, encouraging strategic planning and building joint capacity of members as well as officers. This network builds on an existing strong relationship and is high profile in the area.
Partnership for Elected member support (Bath & North East Somerset)	Funding to support a variety of learning, support and development methods for elected members to act as champions for a particular interest both within the council and outside, eg e-governance.
Bristol City Council – Partnership for Elected Member support	Funding to assist with the set up and running of a sub-regional leadership programme that will prepare councillors for executive and senior positions as well as developing them more generally.

Regional Support/Improvement Partnerships	
Region/Sub region	Description
Dorset Chief Executives Group (led by Dorset County Council)	The Dorset Performance Management Improvement Programme has 3 main strands. These are (1) a programme of performance management improvement activities (2) recruitment of an independent co-ordinator to streamline and integrate systems and deliver a partnership performance framework (3) modernisation of performance management systems.
Gloucestershire County and districts	Project focusing on the critical front line role of senior managers and Members in their representational role for leading and supporting local communities through improved partnership working and encouraging better quality of community engagement. Costs will fund research, identify and learn from best practice and provide community leadership through LSPS.
South West Fire Authorities	Funding will go towards leadership and management training and project management.
South West Improvement Partnership	Initial funding to conduct an audit of what capacity building needs to be routed into the South West. The study will bring together all councils in the region to be clear about what is already underway and to decide regional priorities.
WEST MIDLANDS	
West Midlands LGA	An improvement programme focusing on the regions five common priority areas: regional research and analysis, service planning – effective procurement and risk assessment, ‘raising the level of ambition’, improving corporate performance management and developing an organisational development ‘learning lab’.
Staffordshire Plus Partnership	A host of councils working together to concentrate efforts on Leadership & Change Management, Member Development and Peer Support, Management Development, Strategic Planning and Performance Management and Cross Cutting & Partnership Working. This bid also ties links with the West Midlands Regional Capacity Building Strategy.



Regional Support/Improvement Partnerships	
Region/Sub region	Description
YORKSHIRE & HUMBER	
YHALA	<p>A programme of development to pilot the role that regional partnerships can play in developing and delivering the Capacity Building Programme.</p> <p>Phase I: This work includes funding desk based and interview/survey research; produce some targeted engagement actions; and disseminates findings.</p> <p>Phase II: includes developing and delivering a set of pilots. To increase accessibility of national programmes to and uptake by Yorkshire and Humber local authorities including stimulation of demand if appropriate</p> <p>A further bid has been approved to develop a 3 year comprehensive regional strategy which will enhance the work of the Yorkshire and Humber Local Government Improvement and Innovation Partnership (LGIIIP) in developing and co-ordinating capacity building activities in Yorkshire and Humber's 22 local authorities.</p>

## 9 Appendix B: In-Depth Case Study Summaries

### 9.1 Case Study 1

#### 9.1.1 Context and Concept

Case Study 1 is a district council in an area steeped in mining tradition, which once boasted a flourishing textile industry. Both of these industries declined in the eighties leading to high unemployment and creating a local economy of unskilled workers, with low levels of educational achievement, earning below average wages. Some of this legacy still lives on although the authority may be finally overcoming this through a long term programme of regeneration in the area which is slowly increasing prosperity. Its 'working class' roots have meant that the authority has long been a Labour stronghold, at one time, the party occupied all but one of its 46 council seats, but in the eighties the Labour party began to lose its political dominance.

Today, the council is one of only a few authorities with an elected Mayor. The authority faced considerable change following the election of the Mayor in 2002, and again following the whole council election in 2003 which resulted in a significant number of new councillors and changed the political landscape. The council is currently made up of 25 Independent councillors, 15 Labour, 4 Liberal Democrat and 2 Conservatives. The Mayor has formed a cross party cabinet consisting of himself and five independent portfolio holders plus a Liberal Democrat deputy mayor, all with some delegated powers.

Following the Audit Commission Inspection in 2003 the authority was classified as Weak in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The report identified that within the new administration and amongst existing council managers there had been improvements and investment but that there was also a worrying level of complacency towards delivering necessary improvements in service delivery and provision.

"Not only had you the huge political and structural change, going from a Leader and cabinet to the Mayor and cabinet but the senior management team felt very protective about the authority and there was an element of denial about the score received. It took about 18 months for this to get stripped down and for people to accept that this was the score".

"CPA was looking at things that weren't actually being addressed and incorporated into people's day jobs. It wasn't part of how we were delivering services. It was seen as an add-on and an extra".

Another CPA finding was that the council's ambitions for what it wanted to achieve for the area and for its services were not clear:

"A fair criticism highlighted in the CPA is that we didn't have a vision and that we lacked priorities. It comes back to the type of community [it] was – a mining community".

The authority had always been a very 'traditionally' run council where services were delivered in-house and issues were very much tackled through committee cycle. The strap line for the council used to be 'big enough to deliver, small enough to care'. The new one might be seen to reflect a fundamental shift in how the council views its role in the local community. It is now 'creating a district where people can succeed'.

The CPA report was fundamental in helping MDC to identify where their capacity needs were and in getting staff and elected members to face up to the reality of their council receiving a Weak classification:

"If it hadn't have been for the CPA [the authority] would not have had that shock to make them change. It's a very black and white report – we were classified as Weak and there was no way out of that. I think it was the best thing for [the authority], hard as that was at the time, and has been the best thing at identifying real capacity and improvement that is sustainable. I really think that if we hadn't have had CPA we would not have had that reality check".

After the publication of the report the council took up the opportunity to seek the help and support of an ODPM Lead Official. Once the hard decision had been taken to engage with the Lead Official, the authority tested out ideas and actions to bring about improvement and change. The experience and advice of this individual helped to inform and focus the corporate improvement identified in their initial bids for Direct Support from the CBP.

Much of the work taken forward with Direct Support has been aimed at supporting the authority to deliver their Improvement Plan (2004-2007) and increase efficiency through 'whole council' change. Under a new management structure, informed and proposed as a direct result of work undertaken with Direct Support funding, a Managing Director post has now been created and filled (October 2005) and two new corporate manager positions have also been agreed. Service departments have been aligned and the number of Head of Service posts has been reduced from nine to seven.

### 9.1.2 Other Capacity Building Activities

The work undertaken with help from Direct Support contributes to a programme of organizational improvement set out in the Improvement Plan. Direct Support has been able to contribute to many aspects of this. The contribution of Direct Support is regarded as fundamental to the rapid progress of improvement and activity within the authority.

The council has also recently put in another bid to the CBP for £240,000 of Direct Support to assist them in developing capacity at middle management level. Staff at the authority are keen that Direct Support funding continues to operate as it has in the past, so that they can focus and target activity in the areas where it is needed most or where it can be most effective.

“if it’s not targeted to the real areas you need to address it will not be as successful because it’s not one size fits all [...] I really believe that our improvement has fundamentally been because of the CBF bids and it’s because of that targeted capacity that we have had to be able to improve”.

### 9.1.3 Accessing Direct Support

The process of applying for Direct Support was fairly clear and easy to understand. The authority was also able to benefit from the experience and expertise of the ODPM Lead Official who took them through the process and advised them on how best to target their improvement activity. This help was particularly useful given that there were no bid examples available to consult at the outset of the CBP.

### 9.1.4 Visioning and Priorities

#### 9.1.4.1 Background and Rationale

CPA highlighted that the aims of the authority were too broad and that they lacked the clarity and purposefulness to give direction and to assist the council to prioritise improvement and investment. The council did not have a strong corporate direction and the different service areas were instead trying to fit their own priorities to the corporate centre.

CPA ensured that this was addressed (because of the external scrutiny and engagement with the ODPM) but there was resistance initially amongst the senior management team as they questioned the scope and scale of the improvement work.

The Council Improvement Plan (2004-2007) helped to embed the work and set out the strategic improvements that were needed to increase the performance of the Council from Weak to Good/Excellent. The cabinet and council debated the plan and committed to its delivery and at a political level the plan was championed by the Mayor.

#### 9.1.4.2 Activities

The council worked closely with their ODPM Lead Official and, using the money secured through Direct Support the authority bought in expertise and resource from the IDeA to provide external and critical challenge and to utilise the IDeA’s wider support network.

A large proportion of the support from the IDeA was dedicated to carrying out a scoping exercise for the council, necessary to help realise and clarify the extent of work that needed to be done and provide a ‘reality check’ which would help to prioritise and deliver improvement. This work looked in general terms at how to help deliver internal capacity but also specifically at

how to equip members to face the challenges of being a councillor and how ensure effective procurement processes. Both of these activities are explored in further depth under their own headings.

#### 9.1.4.3 Impact

The funding secured through Direct Support enabled the Council to employ a dedicated resource to assist the Authority in exploring and setting priority areas for improvement. It was also equally important in establishing non-priorities. The fact that the IDeA resource was ring-fenced for this task and could not be spent or used elsewhere helped to secure both this work in terms of its importance and its impact. Without Direct Support the priorities of the council would not have been developed and rolled-out so quickly and *now when the organisation is looking to invest they are much more open and committed to that because they can see the impact and results of the CBF process.*

This visioning and priority setting exercise has also provided the foundation blocks onto which subsequent successful bids for Direct Support have been made. Of particular significance is the bid put in for 'whole council' change which is discussed in detail below.

### 9.1.5 'Whole Council' Change

#### 9.1.5.1 Background and Rationale

It was highlighted in the CPA Report and again in the Audit Commission's Progress Assessment Report (December 2004) that the authority needed to take actions to achieve accelerated improvement within the council. Following on from the initial scoping exercise carried out by the IDeA consultant, the council realised the influence and impact of external support in making fundamental changes to corporate effectiveness, capacity and improvement. As a consequence, a bid was submitted to for Direct Support to:

- Develop and implement a senior management structure in support of a Managing Director.
- Increase Corporate Capacity.
- Develop a culture of learning for best performance management via the implementation of Performance Management Software.

#### 9.1.5.2 Activities

The Council employed the services of an independent 'change agent' for an initial period of 6 months using the funding secured through the CBP. This contract was then extended for a further month using council resources;

*"because they felt there was still benefit in what she was doing and they wanted to transfer knowledge onto key people in the organization before she left".*

The change agent worked with Council staff and members to devise a new senior management structure and to review how resources that operated in a support capacity (e.g. personnel, finance, administration and research)

should be configured in the future. The change agent also assisted with the implementation of TEN Performance Management Software. This directly addressed criticism, highlighted in the CPA, that the council wasn't currently using its performance management information to manage services.

#### 9.1.5.3 *Impact*

The work of the independent change agent "had a very direct and strong influence" and was fundamental to the creation of a new management structure for the Council. This change is highly visible throughout the council, most significantly resulting in the former Chief Executive Officer Post being replaced with a Managing Director Position, (which was filled in October 2005).

"There is now a strategic corporate steer which wasn't there when they were so concentrated on service delivery. This has resulted in changes in processes".

A number of new positions have also been created as a result of the restructure and there are teams in place that weren't before. The need for improvement and the investment in service improvement can be evidenced through the creation of four dedicated Improvement Officer Posts, a Research Officer and an Information Officer position. Service departments have also been restructured and the number of Head of Service posts has been reduced from nine to seven.

The use of a change agent in implementing the new management structure is felt to have been effective at the council not only because of the expertise and experience that this method brought to the authority, but crucially because this driver of change was an 'external voice'. It was thought that because the change agent came from outside of the organization, it was easier for them to exert the authority and to propose and influence the change that was necessary to increase capacity and improve performance.

The work of the change agent has also influenced and directed a recently submitted bid for further Direct Support funding through the CBP. The authority has put in a bid for £240,000 which will look at establishing competency frameworks and skills development for middle managers. If successful, the money will be used to help gather baseline information and pay for the training of staff. The authority has identified 140 staff who have management responsibilities but who have not yet received management development. The council now recognises the importance of investing in this middle management tier in order to increase and improve existing capacity within the organisation. Moreover, a number of middle managers have never worked anywhere else having been at the authority for twenty or more years, and as such, would benefit from exposure to new and external thinking.

"Some of those people have found themselves in a rut. It is about re-motivating them, re-energising them – that is our biggest capacity issue, to really then perform well as an authority and be a high performing

authority delivering high quality services and if we don't address that then again our improvement will plateau and this will be as far as we are able to go".

### 9.1.6 Member Development

#### 9.1.6.1 Background and Rationale

CPA highlighted that the change in administration had resulted in a significant loss of experience amongst councillors at senior level and identified that new councillors needed to learn council procedures. The election in 2003 also resulted in the council being made up of a large number of Independent councillors, many of whom did not have any previous experience of being a councillor and did not have the support of a political party. This also meant that they would not be able to benefit from development courses that would traditionally have been available to them as elected party members.

The support and development for elected members was particularly important and needed to be tackled quickly "because some members did not even understand the CPA process or understand why it needed to be done or that we didn't choose to pay for it - it was compulsory". The authority needed to ensure that Independent Councillors understood the context of their positions and so cabinet members and members with 'Chair' responsibilities were fully briefed on their roles and responsibilities.

#### 9.1.6.2 Activities

A number of member development activities have taken place under this theme of work, including:

- The development of a elected member training programme which includes induction for elected members plus job descriptions, training plans and skills audits.
- Elected members being given the opportunity to complete modules from the IDeA Modern Member Programme to increase understanding of performance management, the role of scrutiny, community leadership and how to be a successful councillor. IDeA are running the modules but additional peer support professionals (identified by the authority) are being brought in to take the sessions,
- The development of Overview and Scrutiny, involving those with 'Chair' responsibilities attending IDeA training on chairing and questioning skills and the scrutiny of finance and budgets.
- Three members of the cabinet attending the IDeA Leadership Academy

#### 9.1.6.3 Impact

As a result of the member development activities supported through Direct Support the authority now feels that they are now more self sufficient and able to deal with the challenge of supporting and developing elected members. The election in 2003 "took us by surprise". However, managers responsible for member development are now confident they have the necessary training framework in place and feel that it has been important that this structure has been tailor-made to the specific requirements of

members in their particular authority. The council is currently selecting peer mentors to ensure that they get the right balance of experts to facilitate the modules on the IDeA Modern Member Programme. One module is entitled 'working with the opposition' because this has recently been identified as an area of need which currently saps capacity.

"The opposition do not know how to be the opposition and to be effective – we need to make it so it's not about politics but that it is about delivering better services and they all have a role in that".

Perception of the take-up of the IDeA Modern Member modules varied according to those that had helped to organize and those that had participated in the sessions. Both were agreed that on average around half of the 46 elected members had attended the various sessions but participants felt that this was a low level of participation whereas staff felt this was indicated a good level of attendance.

Although the member development framework has largely been designed in-house it does incorporate and involve participation in IDeA support delivered as part of the National Programmes. As a consequence the authority has been able to utilise funding from Direct Support and days allocated to members as part of the delivery of the National Programmes. However, eligibility for this support was not clear from the outset and was informally discovered as a result of buying-in member development support from the IDeA.

One member who had attended the IDeA Leadership Academy was enthusiastic about their experience and reported increased vigour in their role as a councillor and member of cabinet. It also offered a chance to network and to gain from the experiences of councillors in other local authorities. However, he also acknowledged how it was hard to utilise the knowledge and good practice learnt at the Academy upon return to his own authority. Translating his experiences into organisational change might have been easier had more members of the cabinet participated in the training.

The authority may lose a large proportion of the councillors it has trained when the elections are held next year. The council has now recognised this and produced documents and has the systems in place to support and develop new elected members and increase their capacity to deliver effective leadership and direction to the authority. The council is also confident that upon completion of the IDeA Modern Member Programme, members will be able to see the benefits that these programmes will have on delivering corporate priorities:

"The only down side for all the support we have got for members is that in just over a years time we will have elections".

Staff feel that the Scrutiny course has been particularly useful. The three scrutiny chairmen have been on this. It was felt that because this is a very new area of local government, benchmarking against best practice has



helped the authority to realise that they were doing well in certain things. One participant felt that some of the aspects of the course were rather boring and very general. In addition, even though all three of the Chairs have taken part in this course initial enthusiasm to try out new ideas and skills learnt on the training programme has resulted in very little direct activity.

A recent inspection (which the authority had not yet had the report for) prompted positive feedback with regard to scrutiny. Respondents felt that eighteen months ago they couldn't have dreamt of getting that kind of feedback and that they now have better understanding of the role of scrutiny and where and when members should be involved. They feel that this has come about as a direct result of the new found confidence of the elected members who have attended the Leadership Academy.

### **9.1.7 Procurement**

#### **9.1.7.1 Background and Rationale**

CPA identified that the authority lacked a procurement strategy and was currently unable to measure whether they were receiving value for money from their purchasing power. It also noted how procurement policy was biased towards retaining the delivery of traditional council run services such as housing maintenance, cleaning and waste management.

The issues outlined in the CPA report were further explored through an IDeA Health Check which the authority voluntarily undertook. The findings from both of these assessments then took on even greater importance and were driven forward through the publication of the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government.

#### **9.1.7.2 Activities**

The money secured through Direct Support was predominantly used to employ the services of an external consultant whose key tasks were to:

- Develop a procurement strategy;
- Develop an e-procurement strategy;
- Implement an overall procurement framework;
- Assist with the implementation of all of the above through the delivery of staff training and coaching.

#### **9.1.7.3 Impact**

The authority now has a procurement strategy and the procurement function has been re-aligned to sit under financial services. A Procurement Champion has also been appointed.

The council doesn't currently have a procurement resource because they had been holding off recruitment until they knew the outcome of a possible shared procurement function with four councils (initiated by the council and facilitated by the Centre for Excellence). For reasons not specified, they have now pulled out of the partnership and the hope is that a procurement manager will now be appointed.

It was felt that the consultant had represented good value for money because staff were very happy with the quality and outcome of the work and the daily rates had worked out less expensive than those originally costed in the bid. As a result of the procurement work, they also now have an ongoing relationship with the consultant which has proved to be very useful even though the project is technically over.

The procurement activities funded through CBP Direct Support were largely driven by a national agenda and it was felt that the authority would have had to tackle these issues with or without the support of the CBP. However, securing the funding did help to ring-fence the money, prioritise the agenda and to move it along at a far greater pace than would probably have been the case. The fact that the funding was directly linked to addressing a local priority was also seen as a good thing. It was felt that this had not always been true of central government initiatives in the past.

### 9.1.8 Conclusion

Direct Support is felt to have been fundamental to the capacity building and service improvement that has so far been achieved by the Council.

“If we hadn’t have had the CBF bid and how we have used it we wouldn’t have had the resources or the capacity to have the improvement that we have delivered. So for us, it has been about resources and improvement. Now we are at a stage where we are very much more self-sufficient for our capacity”.

Direct Support is also seen as a appropriate mechanism to tailor capacity building activities to the specific needs of the authority. It was felt that any changes to the way in which this support was administered would be to the detriment of the success of the building capacity and increasing improvement.

“For me this is the most important thing because we were able to target what we needed to do. If it is moved regionally there is a lot of diversity of status of authorities across the district. It would be very hard to do a one size fits all”.

In Case Study 1 the tailor-made approach has allowed the activities undertaken with the assistance from Direct Support to be an integral part of the council improvement plan. This has helped to facilitate radical organizational change through a new management structure.

“Collectively I feel the programme of activity has been extremely successful. The Structure and Vision for [the authority] were essential and the planning worked well and procurement was a national agenda. The results of the work in my mind have been extremely successful. There is always more to do but for what they were set up to do I think they were very good. And I wouldn’t normally say that”.

Although the council is still classified as Weak, subsequent CPA Progress reviews have noted increased improvement and though it is difficult to attribute direct causality, the qualitative evidence gathered in the fieldwork interviews suggests that the development activities funded by Direct Support have made a significant contribution to these improvements.

## 9.2 Case Study 2

### 9.2.1 Context and Concept

The local authority's capacity building needs were, and are now, shaped by the size of the authority. The small size of the organisation means that staff in corporate roles have all traditionally had to work across several areas. This creates difficulty in staying abreast of new initiatives and developments. Thus they have had to try and learn from neighbouring authorities. However, doing this was hampered by the geography and transport infrastructure of the area which meant even this was time consuming and that they were always one step behind. This had become accepted within the authority and as such there had been a culture of very low expectations and aspirations. Where this was identified by external review it was on a service by service basis meaning that organisational resources could be diverted to one issue or department, with negative consequences for other parts of the organisation.

Prior to the recent improvement programme elected members were overly concerned with ward-based issues and many did not engage sufficiently with the running of the council. Low levels of commitment and activity among elected members remains an issue, though there have been improvements. The council's accommodation is old and unsuitable and remains a barrier to building morale and team working.

When CPA was introduced, "there was nowhere to hide". CPA identified a lack of appropriate and effective processes in the organisation to establish and mainstream the priorities of the organisation. CPA also highlighted what was already obvious in the sense that there was not enough capacity in the organisation. It also highlighted a number of specific concerns, including a lack of clear priorities and strategic direction, insufficient alignment of organisational resources with the priorities of the organisation, poor strategic and scrutiny procedures among elected members, performance management and low staff morale. High numbers of vacancies and recruitment and retention problems were also noted.

Respondents felt that the activities defined at CPA were now being addressed and that the Improvement Plan was being implemented effectively, but that there were ongoing capacity building needs arising from central government agendas. For instance, the emphasis being placed on community leadership would require capacity building, as would implementing changes which might arise from the forthcoming White Paper. In dealing with this, it was felt that the authority needed more central/corporate confidence and direction to be able to show how its own agenda was being driven forward.

Respondents also noted that while the CPA had correctly identified many genuine weaknesses, frequent external criticism was detrimental to morale and had the potential to undermine genuine efforts at improvement. Despite some ongoing problems, it was widely felt that the authority had made progress and that achievements should be recognized and celebrated, as a means of rewarding progress and generating future commitment.

The key improvement challenge was now securing more widespread commitment to, and embedding of, new processes and practices that have been introduced as part of the Improvement Programme. This is being viewed widely as a need for 'culture change' and will take a considerable time to secure. There were concerns that central government and the Audit Commission do not acknowledge the time and effort that securing such change will take.

### 9.2.2 Other Capacity Building Activities

The council has a variety of capacity building and improvement activity underway, supported through its Improvement Plan. The Improvement Plan has six themed project areas:

- **Leadership** – including the establishment and operation of a group leaders forum, a review of policy committees, member development activity, management development, work on overview and scrutiny and community leadership.
- **Culture change** – initial consultancy to diagnose issues, development of a communication plan, a workforce development plan and a customer care policy.
- **Vision and priorities** – a stream of work, supported by the IDeA to establish a statement of priorities and to mainstream these through the organisation's processes.
- **Getting things done** – including establishing a Performance Management Framework, Risk Management Strategy, Project Management practices, and development of project management skills.
- **Partnerships and external relationships** – including reviews of partnerships and partnership working to ensure that these are beneficial.
- **High profile operational issues** – projects developed to address service-specific issues in Waste Management, housing and planning.

Collectively, all this improvement activity was thought to be impacting on the culture of the organisation, changing the attitude to improvement and change. Activities funded by Direct Support were relevant and linked to these general themes and appear in the Improvement Plan. While they form only a small part of the improvement activity, they have been central to the management of the improvement process through the establishment of the project management process that has underpinned the Improvement Plan and, funding the officer that is responsible for coordinating the development of the Plan and associated activities.

### 9.2.3 Accessing Direct Support

The process of accessing Direct Support was thought to be simple and effective. The pro-formas helped to focus attention on the organisational changes to be achieved and they received sufficient support in making the application from the ODPM Lead Official.

### 9.2.4 Project Management

#### 9.2.4.1 Background and Rationale

In the past there had been only a small number of individuals in the authority with experience of project management training. They were therefore seen as the source of knowledge on project management in the authority and would be expected to support project development across the authority. This was evidence of how the authority didn't equip its staff or make best use of its resources in the past. Developing project management skills was thought to be one way of generalising generic skills throughout the organisation and linking these to the establishment of complimentary processes that would allow these skills to be used in the workplace.

The project was developed jointly with another council in the region who like Case Study 2 face very similar problems in being a small local authority.

#### 9.2.4.2 Activities

This work had several aspects. Two separate training courses were run. The first involved developing core technical skills in project management with those managers likely to need them. The level of the training was consistent with Prince2 but stopped short of an actual Prince2 course as this was felt to be beyond the needs of the organisation. The second course focused on generalising familiarity with the concepts and language of Prince2 so that others can understand the documents and processes used. The delivery of the training was put out to tender. The authority also developed internal guidance to support a council-wide project management procedure.

#### 9.2.4.3 Impact

At the level of individuals the impact of the training was thought to be extensive. Individuals had learned new skills and were demonstrably using these in the authority. Where project managers had taken up the methodologies they were definitely thought to be in greater control of their projects and appeared to be more confident as a result. In particular, there was some indication that as a result of adopting formal project management processes, individual staff now felt less personally/individually responsible (especially for problems) which placed a greater emphasis on collective organisational processes. The result of this was that problems are more likely to be discussed and managed in an open way. To some extent, staff are more comfortable and satisfied as a result.

Use of the methodology also meant that more options were formally considered and familiarity with the concepts and tools throughout the authority meant that when proposals were put in front of the senior management team and elected members they were able to challenge the options put forward. Cumulatively, it was felt that this led to incremental

and gradual pressures toward innovation. These individual level impacts were thought to be sustainable so long as those trained stayed in the authority. However, because of the perceived success of the intervention, the authority had decided to use mainstream funding to spread the training more widely in the authority and to make it part of the induction for some groups of new staff – thereby ensuring that there is a sustained and culture changing impact.

At the team and authority level there was definitely improved business systems as a result of this theme of work and project and programme management capacity had increased. Further, (as above) this was thought also to result in greater motivation to innovate within the culture of the organisation.

However, while there had been progress made in project management, there was also evidence that more work needed to be done to ensure that ongoing project management procedures were upheld. For instance, while staff were competent at producing effective Project Initiation Documents, there were some concerns about competency in ongoing monitoring and reporting. This was recognised and further work was underway to further embed the use of standardised procedures, for instance through the use of project management software.

The factors driving the achievements of these positive impacts were the ability to tailor the training to the type of support needed, in terms of where it was delivered and the length of time taken in participation (i.e. short course) and to the level (i.e. not Prince2 but “in the spirit of it”). The critical mass factor was also present with entire groups of staff being trained in the same methods at the same time, with even larger groups of staff being offered some familiarity with the concepts and philosophy which underpin it. This helped to build commitment within the authority as well as allowing the methods to be used in the workplace.

## **9.2.5 Visioning and Priorities**

### **9.2.5.1 Background and Rationale**

CPA highlighted that the authority did not have a single and widely embedded statement of what it wanted to achieve in order to guide the development of activities and alignment of resources in the organisation. CPA ensured that this needed to be dealt with (because of the external scrutiny and monitoring). However, even after this, the previous leadership resisted this change and the project initially stalled because of a mixture of inertia and resistance.

The need for Visioning and Priorities work was identified from CPA and support was immediately offered by the IDeA, subsidized by CBP money. Some respondents felt like they were being presented with a fait-a-compli by the IDeA but since they needed the support quickly and were not unhappy with the IDeA as a choice (just had concerns over the process) they did not object.



### 9.2.5.2 Activities

There have been a variety of visioning and consultation days, facilitated by the IDeA. These have resulted in the production of a statement of priorities for the council. Though there was initially intransigence and resistance, all political parties have now signed up 100% to the statement, which was felt to be a major step forward. Work has subsequently begun to embed the priorities in the processes and structures of the authority by first integrating them into the Corporate Plan and then ensuring that Service Improvement Plans match up to them. This work has begun and all Service Improvement Plans are to show how they contribute to the achievement of the organisation's priorities. They have also begun a process of reviewing these to check the extent to which they are in line with the priorities, to increase transparency and to inform political debates about this.

### 9.2.5.3 Impact

The agreement of the statement of priorities provides major evidence of impact. The review of service improvement plans suggests that there has been demonstrable process in aligning organisational resources behind these priorities. However, it also showed that there was further work to be done in this area, in particular by turning the process round so that plans are not amended to make them consistent with the priorities, but use these as a starting point. The debate over the balance of resources aligned to each of the priorities will provide further evidence of impact.

This had demonstrably improved organisational business planning and target setting procedures but there is still further work to be done.

## 9.2.6 Member Development

### 9.2.6.1 Background

CPA highlighted the authority as having poor relationships between elected members and senior officers. The election in 2003 also resulted in a large change in elected members with many of the executive that was produced by this election not having experience of being a councillor let alone being an executive member. As such, there was an additional need to develop the personal capacities of members themselves.

### 9.2.6.2 Activities

There have been a number of activities developed under this theme of work. All political groups received support through the Peer Clearing House from political peers. The leader and five other members from a range of political groups attended the IDeA Leadership Academy. Workshops were organised on community leadership and new council structures and structured visits were organised to other councils. Other work was also undertaken on Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) which involved IDeA facilitated diagnosis of development needs, attendance (by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee) at the IDeA Overview and Scrutiny training course, production of an improvement plan and support in conducting a review of an external partnership (LSP).

### 9.2.6.3 Impact

The IDeA support for the development of Overview and Scrutiny first identified a range of shortcomings. The O&S committee was too externally focused and did not devote enough of its time to scrutinising internal matters, and also did not have an agreed forward work plan. Collectively this meant that it was not strategic enough. As a result of this diagnosis and the support received, the O&S committee has a twelve month agreed work programme, is much more strategic in nature and focuses more of its time internally on issues that the council can affect.

The O&S committee has also undertaken a self assessment programme and reviewed its own improvement plan, thereby sustaining the momentum of improvement. Members of the O&S committee are now more engaged, as demonstrated by attendance at meetings and at external 'extra' meetings and conferences. The committee also put in a bid for more resources in the budget process (following one of the recommendations of the IDeA work) but this was rejected. They are currently looking at other ways of sourcing additional funding. Finally, as a result of the IDeA supported review of the LSP, they have a model framework for assessing the contribution and benefits of external partnerships. This positive impact was attributed to the role of external challenge as well as the knowledge, experience and credibility of the IDeA as facilitators.

Members who had attended the IDeA Leadership Academy were enthusiastic about their experience. They reported increased motivation, and that they had gained new skills which they had been able to use in their roles as councillors. They also thought that the Leadership Academy offered them the chance to network and to gain from experiences in other local authorities.

Members also thought that other support received from the IDeA to facilitate better corporate working practices had been helpful in redefining the relationship between councillors and officers.

Collectively, the experience of the Leadership Academy and additional support had contributed to the development of the Vision and Priorities for the organisation and the processes that underpinned this, including the alignment of service plans within these. As such, member development activity had achieved both individual and organisational impacts. However, problems still remained with the motivation and commitment of many elected members and some tensions remained in the relationship between officers and members.

## 9.2.7 Improvement Team

### 9.2.7.1 Background

Previously many projects and initiatives had stalled through a lack of dedicated resource. There were therefore concerns that the implementation of the Improvement Plan was at risk because of a lack of resources and staff.



### 9.2.7.2 Activities

The authority had created an Improvement Board made up of leading members and senior managers in the authority. In addition to this, and reporting to the Board, the authority used CBP Direct Support funding to back-fill an existing post to allow dedicated officer time to be devoted to supporting the improvement process, including coordinating the delivery of the Improvement Plan. The post supports improvement in and across the authority in a number of different ways:

- By working across the council and making linkages between projects and initiatives in different parts of the organization. This could help in achieving more efficient activities and reducing unnecessary duplication.
- Supporting staff in using new skills such as project management techniques (project planning, risk assessment, monitoring), using IT software and systems, using the performance management system. Important in this was building the confidence of staff to use these skills independently.
- Tracking the progress of projects under the Improvement Plan.
- Brokering tensions and decisions among between different parts of the organisation.
- Coordinating the process of documenting decisions and improvement activities to provide the evidence base for future performance inspections and external audit.

### 9.2.7.3 Impact

The member of staff who filled the Improvement Officer post subsequently left the authority and a temporary replacement has also left. The post is now filled by its third incumbent.

It was generally thought that the dedicated staff time had helped to drive and sustain momentum and the current post-holder has substantial previous experience of being a consultant to public and private sectors on business processes, risk and project management. The post had been able to add momentum and sustainability to the improvement process and separate projects. Other staff clearly appreciated the advice and support provided by this dedicated resource. The funding for the Improvement Officer and the improvement team has now been placed in mainstream budgets and is thus sustainable.

## 9.2.8 Culture change

### 9.2.8.1 Background

There are several strands of activity being undertaken through the Improvement Plan on culture change. These relate to Customer Services, Workforce Strategy and Communications Strategy. They are now putting a Culture Change PID together. This is being shaped by the Direct Support funded activity though it is not itself funded through Direct Support.

### 9.2.8.2 Activities

Direct Support for culture change supported two days of diagnostic activity from consultants and then a workshop designed to set out a statement of culture change needs.

### 9.2.8.3 Impact

This is now shaping activity to be taken up as part of culture change activity. In limited terms then, it has had an impact.

## 9.2.9 Role of Direct Support

A number of specific aspects of Direct Support were identified as linked causally to the beneficial impacts noted:

- The ability to tailor the support and development activity to specific local needs and to develop partnerships where these are relevant but not to artificially create them where not.
- The bidding process helps to select priorities for activity that are shared between the authority and central government. As such it helps to ensure that these activities meet what is wanted locally, but also that these needs are gradually opened up to external ideas.
- The credibility given to internal change projects by support from the CBP and linkages to the engagement/CPA process. It was thought that this meant that there was an external momentum to the process.
- The use of central bodies and their expertise also added to the legitimacy and credibility of the change projects as well as exposing the senior levels of the organisation to external ideas. This has been helpful in building a commitment to change as opposed to “doing things the way that they have always been done”.
- It was also thought that while there was some recognition of the need to undertake much of the activity that has been supported by Direct Support, there may have been a lack of willingness to divert resources to it.

## 9.2.10 Conclusions

Councils had clearly been able to use Direct Support to support and kick-start improvement activity. This was explicitly linked to the authority's Improvement Plan and was justified by the weaknesses identified by CPA. Direct Support was thought to have allowed activity to take place that would have otherwise been impossible or difficult to develop, either because of a lack of resources or because of inertia and resistance to change. The mode of delivering support was appropriate and conferred legitimacy on capacity building improvement activities through ‘the stamp of approval’ of central government or central bodies (IDeA) who delivered the activity. Direct Support had also allowed a balance to be struck between local and central government priorities, with the specifics of activity able to be tailored to the authority's needs.

The projects and activities developed with Direct Support had also clearly contributed to the authority's improvement. There was evidence of both individual and organisational change. Project management processes were

being used and were becoming embedded in the organisational culture. Member development activity had made Overview and Scrutiny more strategic in nature and members were now more engaged.

## 9.3 Case Study 3

### 9.3.1 Context and Concept

Following a negative Corporate Governance Inspection in 2001 the authority was one of the first to be subject to engagement and intervention, first under the leadership of the Audit Commission and subsequently the ODPM (now Department for Communities and Local Government). The Corporate Governance Inspection found serious weaknesses in community leadership and engagement, management processes, performance management, financial management and political leadership. The authority's senior management team was subsequently removed and a new management team and interim Chief Executive was appointed. The Corporate Governance Inspection and first round of CPA found that progress was being made but continued to highlight the need to build capacity around the authority's governance systems (particularly programme, risk and financial management) and management capacity to operate these.

One of the first steps in the recovery process was a wide programme of consultation with staff, led by the interim Chief Executive. This consultation identified serious morale problems, many of which were exacerbated by the negative CPA. Many staff felt that genuine achievements were not being adequately recognized. The consultation also revealed serious concerns over the quality of leadership, senior and middle management. These concerns shaped the development of capacity building activities implemented with Direct Support.

A new, permanent Chief Executive has now been in post for several years and, after a period of rapid turnover; the Executive Management Team is settled. Subsequent CPA reports have identified significant improvement. At the 2005 CPA, the authority was rated as 3 stars and improving well. The Corporate Assessment highlighted staff development as effective and significant improvements in the confidence, competence and morale of staff.

The concept of capacity utilised in the authority is strongly influenced by the concept of the learning organisation. Much of the work taken forward with Direct Support was aimed at developing a learning and reflective culture and a sustainable long-term commitment to the development of staff. There was also an emphasis on developing internal capacity through internalising skill-sets rather than continued reliance on external expertise and consultancy.

### 9.3.2 Other Capacity Building Activities

The work undertaken with help from Direct Support contributes to an integrated project for organisational improvement and development, set out successively in the initial Recovery Plan and in subsequent iterations of this as

an improvement plan. Direct Support has been able to contribute to many aspects of this. There was some prior commitment to this improvement and organisational development agenda, including the allocation of resources. However, the contribution of Direct Support was thought to be vital to securing rapid progress and ensuring that a 'critical mass' of activity was developed within a short period of time, thereby allowing the activity to have much greater and more timely impact. Other work underway includes a programme of member development activities, knowledge management, performance and programme and project management.

### 9.3.3 Accessing Direct Support

The process of applying for Direct Support was thought to be clear and easy to understand. The process had also improved between bids and the introduction of the pro-forma was thought to be helpful in structuring the bid to ensure that individual staff development was clearly linked to organisational development.

### 9.3.4 Management Development

#### 9.3.4.1 Background and Rationale

The background and rationale for the introduction of the Management Development Strategy and Programme was the consultation with staff in 2002:

"Recent workshops involving our staff and our employee survey told us that the Council staff want strong, effective leadership and managers who are fair, consistent, open and honest. This is management development strategy aims to ensure that this happens, by providing a robust framework to recruit and develop our managers." (Management Development Strategy).

The management development strategy was also linked to the recovery plan, but was not intended to be a one-off time limited set of interventions. Rather, it was intended to provide an ongoing resource for manager development and to shape the HR and progression system within the authority, thereby linking to recruitment and retention, induction, development and learning and individual performance management. Ultimately, expected outcomes were elaborated at an individual, team and organisational level:

- Organisational:
  - Better quality services and satisfied customers.
  - Excellent corporate performance that is reflected in performance indicators, inspection and best value reports and the comprehensive performance assessment outcomes.
  - An organisational culture that is focused on key performance objectives supported by regular performance review and an ongoing programme of training and development for managers.

- Training and development is regarded as an individual and corporate priority; developing people is an integral part of day to day management and managers are personally involved in growing their own staff and succession planning.
- Increased corporate investment in training and development for managers.
- Ability to attract and retain the best managers because the council has a reputation for training and developing its staff and therefore is an employer of choice.
- Team:
  - Clarity about aims and objectives and the contribution expected from each team member.
  - Balanced teams where the particular skills and competencies of individuals are valued as vital to team effectiveness.
  - Climate of openness, honesty and trust where ideas and new approaches are encouraged and problems are resolved on a joint basis.
  - Regular opportunities to review and agree training needs resulting in development action plans for the team and shared learning.
  - A culture that supports new ideas, creativity, entrepreneurial ability and risk taking.
- Individual:
  - New recruits feel welcomed into the organisation and are soon able to maximise their performance in their new role.
  - Managers throughout the organisation are able to plan and tackle key challenges facing the council now and in the future.
  - An opportunity to attend a management development centre that provides:
    - A profile of themselves against a proven behavioural competence framework; thereby making them more aware of their strengths and limitations.
    - The opportunity to review and consolidate their career goals and priorities.
    - The opportunity to consider the implications of personal style and preference on the working dynamics of the council.
    - The opportunity to use the competency framework and feedback to think corporately and take a wide management perspective in the emerging environment.
    - A development action plan which identifies the managers learning needs in order for them to achieve their performance targets.
    - Access to continuing development support through their line manager and the management development programme.

#### 9.3.4.2 Activities

The Management Development Strategy and subsequent Management Development Programme have several strands, detailed below. The exact extent to which each of these were funded by Direct Support was unclear, though it was reported that the whole programme was enabled by Direct Support, with additional funding provided by the authority. It was reported

that the programme would not have reached the scale or scope that it has without Direct Support and nor would it have been developed and rolled-out so quickly.

### Establishment of a management competency framework

This was developed with the assistance of an IDeA recommended consultant. The framework has three components: values; technical skills and knowledge and behaviour. At the time of establishing the Competency framework, there was no agreed official statement of values for the organisation, and this was taken forward separately. Technical skills and competencies were established under four headings (corporate interface; managing people, managing resources and equalities and inclusion) with a heavy emphasis on the policies and procedures of the council to provide the content. As such, skills and competencies are conceived in the Management Development Strategy as familiarity with the council's procedures in a variety of areas. The behavioural aspect of the strategy was split into nine behaviours, grouped in four clusters (thinking; direction; motivation; achievement/action) "associated with superior performance". These nine behaviours then formed the basis for commissioned delivery of the management development centres, individual and team coaching and ongoing development and training programmes.

**Table 4:** Management Competency Framework

The thinking/cognitive cluster		The directional cluster	
1.	thinking analytically	3.	influencing
2.	thinking flexibly	4.	building confidence in others
		5.	getting the message across
The motivational cluster		The achievement/action cluster	
6.	developing people	8.	making things happen
7.	facilitating	9.	focusing on achievement

### Management Development Centres

These are three day development centres, with one residential unit. They focus heavily on 360 degree appraisal, profiling and behavioural assessment, using role-play, interviews, questionnaires and scenario setting. They aim to offer each individual participant a profile of strengths and weaknesses and an action plan to address these. Initially the centres were developed and delivered by consultants, but an explicit early assumption was that in-house assessors would be trained to operate the development centres on an ongoing basis, in order to internalise the relevant skills-sets and ensure that the initiative is sustainable. The tender specification stipulated that the development centres were to be based upon the behaviours established in the competency framework. Senior and middle managers (4th tier) have now participated on at least one of these and in-house assessors have been

trained. In addition, licenses have been obtained to ensure that internal assessors are appropriately accredited.

### **Individual and team coaching**

Following participation at a development centre, senior managers were then offered a small amount (6 sessions) of one-to-one coaching. This was first piloted with individual managers able to nominate themselves. The delivery of the coaching was put out to tender, again with the stipulation that it had to be delivered in relation to the behaviours in the management competency framework. After an initial evaluation, the coaching is to be rolled-out to a wider group of managers.

### **Rising Stars**

Rising stars (“low/middle tier managers who have demonstrated the potential to move into senior management”) were, in the main, identified and nominated by their line managers but could also self-nominate. Nominations required evidence to be provided of examples of behaviour which were similar to the management behaviours from the Management Competency Framework. Once accepted for the programme, rising stars were allowed to attend Management Development Centres, where all participants were rising stars. Subsequent to the Management Development Centres, rising stars were encouraged to maintain contact with one another through regular meetings and email communication to share experiences and learning. Rising stars were also added to the project staff database, using their profiles from the 360 degree assessment as the basis for their listing.

#### **9.3.4.3 Impact**

##### **Management Competency Framework**

The management competency framework was clearly being used in the structure of management development activities, the management development programme and coaching sessions. The Management Development Programme includes forty short courses (2 hours - one day) which are delivered throughout the year by both internal staff and external consultants. Some of these are augmented with follow-on e-learning resources. The framework was also widely referred to in discussions with respondents, providing some evidence that it is becoming embedded in the systems and culture of the organization. It is the basis of recruitment and progression procedures.

The framework is heavily focused on behaviours rather than knowledge and skills. It was notable that discussions with respondents revealed their perception of development and management responsibilities in behavioural rather than ‘hard-skill’/knowledge terms, providing further evidence of cultural embedding.



## Management Development Centres

Management Development Centres are internally evaluated in several ways. At the end of the sessions, an informal 'flip chart' evaluation is used to collect initial impressions. Six weeks after the event a questionnaire based evaluation is conducted. The results of these questionnaires are collated on an annual basis and used as the basis of discussions with management teams about how they use the development of individual staff and whether changes have been made as a result. Discussions also focus on why changes may have not been made. Additionally, feedback is used to review and amend the content of the Centres themselves.

Respondents who had participated on the Management Development Centres were universally positive about the experience and the impact on them, their workplace performance and, through this, on colleagues and the organisation itself. While respondents may have been 'cherry picked' by the authority to offer a positive impression, the respondents tended to report that colleagues had similar experiences, though this was not universal. In one department, several respondents noted that some colleagues had not enjoyed the development centres and had subsequently left the organisation, with the perception being offered that they did not see their own values as being consistent with the direction of the council. While respondents reported that they did not see the development that they had undertaken as increasing their likelihood of leaving the organisation to pursue their career, there was some concern within the authority at the level of staff retention, given the significant investment made in staff development and the costs of replacement recruitment (particularly as Assessment Centres are routinely used for all management positions above service level).

Respondents reported that they felt more confident in their jobs, had increased motivation and had adapted their behaviour in the workplace as a result of the centres. They also reported that they had attempted to share the benefits of their experience with colleagues through briefing them on behavioural styles and the impact of these on others. Several respondents thought that they had been more effective in their jobs as a result of their experience and that through this had been able to influence more positive team relationships. Several respondents also reported increased aspirations as a result of the Management Development Centres and that they had progressed in the organisation, partially as a result of participation. Participant respondents were universal in reporting that they would enjoy the opportunity to attend further Development Centres and many thought that it would be beneficial for more staff to be able to experience them.

A key factor in securing positive impact was thought to be the commitment and willingness of participants to be involved, opening up to the process. A clear understanding of why participation is important and that it is not a judgmental, but a supportive process, were all thought to be important.



The authority had compiled a database of behavioural strengths and weaknesses, derived from the appraisal elements of the centres, and there was evidence that this database was being used to staff project teams in a flexible manner, though there were also intentions to make greater use of this database. These opportunities had been further valued by staff.

Positive impacts at team and organisational level are clearly related to the extent to which line managers recognise and encourage the potential to allow individuals to apply learning and to share the benefits of this with others in the team. A key factor in the positive impact of Development Centres and development courses on the authority was the number of managers that had been able to go through the scheme and the extent to which it had been shaped to the specific needs of the authority. For instance, the Development Centres and wider development programme were both shaped to fit with the management competency framework.

There was only one real aspect of improvement identified by respondents. This was the need to cascade Development Centre participation to a wider group of staff. However, there may also be scope to place more formal emphasis on the role of sharing the benefits of development with colleagues after participation at the Centres.

### **Individual and Team Coaching**

An evaluation had been conducted for the individual team coaching pilot. This was based on a questionnaire of participants. Findings from this suggested that participants were happy with the quality of the coaches and coaching arrangements. The majority of participants thought that the coaching sessions had either 'completely' achieved their aims and expectations or 'exceeded' them, and when asked about their experience, the majority rated this as 'very good' or 'excellent'. All participants said that they would recommend coaching to others based on their experiences.

Respondents who had received coaching were universally positive about their experiences, with several bordering on the evangelical about the positive impact. Respondents reported increased confidence and motivation, reduced uncertainty and workplace stress and enhanced performance. They universally reported that they had changed their workplace behaviours as a result of coaching and in some cases reported that this had been beneficial to their teams and departments, even through changing the behaviours of colleagues and staff. Respondents thought that they would like further coaching and that, where possible, this should be cascaded to a wider staff group. One respondent had engaged their coach for further sessions using their own finances. Respondents who had received coaching tended to report that the experience had made them feel 'invested in' and therefore made them feel more valued by the organisation. While it was noted that there was scope for individuals to use it simply as a personal career development vehicle, most reported that they were more inclined to stay with the authority because of this notion of feeling valued.

Respondents thought that their coaches had been well prepared, skilled and effective, and that this competence was important. The impact of coaching was again reliant, to an extent, on the willingness of line managers to consider requests or approaches that arose from the coaching process. In some cases coaching appeared to provide legitimacy to raise long-standing concerns (e.g. “my coach thought that I should raise my concerns with ...”) over processes or the behaviour of colleagues and even the line manager themselves.

The impact of team coaching was also thought to be beneficial, if less clearly so than individual coaching. This was identified with limiting features in relation to coaching teams rather than individuals, including the difficulty of securing the commitment and openness of a group of staff as opposed to an individual and the challenges posed by accommodating varying personalities. Team coaching had also been implemented in teams facing particular challenges associated with under-performance and conflict. However, team coaching was attributed to having moved teams further forward, reducing tensions and improving team dynamics.

One issue which was addressed in discussions but which did not produce a clear answer related to whether individual coaching should be run alongside team coaching. In a similar vein there was no clear evidence to suggest whether teams where several individuals are engaged in individual coaching should have the same or different coaches.

## **Rising Stars**

Rising stars had participated on the Management Development Centres and impacts were broadly consistent with these. However, one rising star had demonstrably progressed in the organisation and had been given experience on project teams as a result of participation. Another felt that they would have had a similar experience but had been prevented from doing so by a combination of intervening illness and organisational restructuring. However, it was again felt that a key determinant of ongoing impact would be sustained support for development, and commitment of line managers to getting the most out of the individual who had received development opportunities.

### **9.3.5 Team Awards**

#### **9.3.5.1 Background and Rationale**

The rationale for the introduction of team awards was set by the consultation with staff in 2002 which, following the 2001 critical Corporate Governance Inspection, identified very low staff morale as a major challenge for the council. The aim of the team awards was to address low morale, celebrate achievement and build both a positive internal and external image for the authority and its staff. In particular it was intended to celebrate the achievements of staff which may not be fully recognized in the course of formal performance management and the CPA process. They are also aimed at motivating greater team working and sharing good practice throughout the authority.

### 9.3.5.2 Activities

There are thirteen categories of team awards, each with different criteria:

- **The Annual Cabinet award for Corporate initiative of the year** – Criteria: Achievement of a cross-cutting initiative; effective team working; transformation of traditional boundaries or the improvement of systems and processes for people of the authority.
- **The Annual Award for Building Pride in the local area** – Criteria: improved contact and engagement with the local community, furtherance of social inclusion; cultural awareness; impact on achievement of council's vision.
- **The Annual Environmental Improvement Award** – Criteria: improvement of the environment for citizens or employees (through savings, efficiencies, green space, recycling, reduction in pollution or redesign).
- **The Annual Partnership Award** – Criteria: improvement of partnership working between council and another agency (e.g. Government, public, private, voluntary sector organisation).
- **The Annual Customer Focus Award** – improved involvement of users, residents, businesses and/or partners in service provision.
- **The Annual Innovation Award** – Criteria: most inventive use of money, people, technology for service improvement (through savings, efficiencies, redeployment, re-designing).
- **The Annual Improving Health Award** – Criteria: encouragement of healthier lifestyles among children, adults, employees, citizens of the authority.
- **The Annual Service Improvement for Most Improvement** – two awards. First is for Direct Services – Criteria: improved performance. Second is for Support Services – Criteria: improved services.
- **The Annual Service Improvement Award For Excellence** – Criteria: excellent performance (top quartile) and maintained or improved.
- **The Annual Managing Uncertainty Award** – Criteria: well managed unplanned event or 'moment'.
- **The Annual School of the year Award** – Criteria: improvement in attainment, standards and inclusion.
- **The Annual Communication of the Year Award** – Criteria: knowledge of target audience, real ability to listen, positive outcome from communication.
- **The Annual Citizen Impact Award** – Criteria: improved lives of citizens.

In addition to these, there are two additional awards chosen respectively by the Leader and Chief Executive: The Leader of the Council Award for the Most Improved Team, and the Chief Executive Award for Leadership.

Projects are put forward on a self-nomination basis on a standard form, with the deadline for submission being the end of May each year. A judging panel made up of a range of people including Cabinet Members, representatives of central bodies (LGA, IDeA), partner organizations (health sector, police), the voluntary sector and service users. A selection of finalists are announced and invited to attend the annual award ceremony at a local Stadium, with

ball-style dinner and ceremony with the winners invited on-stage to collect their awards. Prior to the event all, finalists are photographed and interviewed about their experience of nominating the award and the impact of selection on their team. This is then collated and placed on the council's intranet in order to share learning between teams. An evaluation form is sent to all nominated teams.

#### 9.3.5.3 *Impact*

Evidence of impact was not fully conclusive, but this was partly a result of the limited nature of the fieldwork and there was certainly no evidence to suggest that the objectives of the awards were not being met. The evidence that was available indicated that the Awards went at least some way to meeting their objectives.

Central coordinators reported anecdotal evidence that the awards created 'a buzz' in the authority and that they achieved their aim of encouraging staff to be positive about their achievements. However, the formal evaluation did not adequately assess impacts. Nevertheless, take-up of the awards (in terms of numbers of applications had increased year on year and stood at 138 for 2006) and discussions with respondents who had won awards suggested that they did fulfill the aim of increasing morale, motivation, team building and legitimised service provision. Again, while the Corporate Assessment did not attribute causality between improved morale and this particular intervention, there was no reason to suggest that they had not been partially responsible.

The extent to which the awards were successful in promoting shared learning was at this stage unclear, though this formed part of the rationale for submitting the application for one respondent team. They also thought that the awards were a good opportunity to make connections with other parts of the council and external partners who work in complementary areas. A new web facility to encourage shared learning is being launched this year and page usage will be monitored. Evaluation activities are also being reviewed with scope for a more impact-focused approach. The extent to which the awards promote a positive external image of the council was again unclear, though there was nothing to suggest that this was not the case. There were intentions to make the awards self-financing through sponsorship in recognition of the potential for criticism and negative publicity that might in the future come from using council funds. The willingness of some external teams to invite external partners to the awards ceremony suggested that they had confidence in the potential impact on their own external image.

The awards appeared to be well managed and the promotional brochure designed to encourage teams to apply was clear and included easy to complete application forms. Process issues related to the administration of the scheme were well covered in the evaluation and there was evidence of changes being made to the format of the scheme in response to feedback. Evidence from respondents suggested that the quality and professionalism of the awards ceremony was recognised and one team suggested that they

thought it was suitable for external partners and they would be inviting external partners to cement partnerships. Finally, the awards scheme was felt to be effective by respondents in realising its aims because of the regard in which senior levels of the organization treated them. For instance, the active commitment of cabinet members, the leader and the Chief Executive all added to the credibility of the scheme.

### **9.3.6 Project Management**

#### **9.3.6.1 Background and Rationale**

Prior to the establishment of the recovery Plan in 2002, the council had not had standard project management procedures in place. A project management approach was adopted for the implementation of the Recovery Plan. However, this revealed that staff did not fully understand project management methodologies and as such it was necessary to put training in place. Project management training was commissioned from an independent consultant with the advice and direction of the IDeA.

#### **9.3.6.2 Activities**

Direct Support was used as a means of establishing familiarity with project management techniques. Training was commissioned, based on tools and awareness raising, rather than being overly technical. Subsequent to the delivery of this training, the council, using mainstream resources, has established two different levels of project management procedure, the first for large-scale projects and the second for smaller projects. The large-scale project management methodology is Prince2 based whereas the small-scale methodology is much simpler and less technical, reflecting a conscious decision not to 'hamstring' the delivery of small projects with unnecessarily complicated administrative procedures. These procedures are being administered by a Project Office, established for the purpose.

#### **9.3.6.3 Impact**

The initial Direct Support supported only a very small amount of initial training and awareness raising to familiarise senior officers with the basic tools and principles of project management. Respondents reported that it had partially achieved this but had not had a major impact on the way projects were managed in the organisation. It may have had some impact in influencing the subsequent decision to increase the emphasis on establishing standard procedures for project management. These procedures were now in place but had yet to become embedded in the organisation. However, use of these procedures is now a pre-requirement of project approval and there was strong senior level commitment for them. It was therefore expected that use of the procedures would become rapidly embedded. The tools and techniques disseminated by the initial training were thought to be of use in applying the new procedures.

#### **9.3.7 Conclusion**

Direct Support had clearly contributed significantly to enabling a substantial amount of individual and organisational development activity to take place. Direct Support was felt to be an appropriate mechanism to tailor capacity building activities to the specific needs of the authority. This allowed the

activities undertaken with the assistance from Direct Support to be well integrated with the wider range of improvement and capacity building activity underway in the authority. Direct Support also allowed development activity to reach a 'critical mass' of management, thus enabling individual development to contribute to organisational change and improvement.

The general approach to capacity building within the authority was influenced by a commitment to the 'organisational learning' model, with a wider commitment to training and development, and knowledge management. Training and development was effectively integrated with HR practices and the emphasis was clearly on progressing existing staff through the organisation, partly to address recruitment and retention challenges. The staff development approach was heavily behaviourally focused.

Activities developed through Direct Support were generally well regarded and appeared, from the evidence available, to be effective in meeting their aims. Staff undertaking development activities appeared to be more confident, competent and motivated as a result of their engagement with these activities. The investment in staff development was also appreciated by staff, who felt 'valued' by the organisation. There also appeared to be an organisational culture of sharing learning and the benefits of individual development, though there was scope to increase the emphasis on formal processes of sharing learning. Some of the approaches taken (e.g. team awards; rising stars, database of project skills) were innovative and appeared to be raising morale and motivation in the authority. There was also some commitment to shared good practice, though again this appeared to be less developed, and required additional work. Nevertheless, this was recognised and plans were in place to improve the sharing of good practice, for instance through placing the experiences of team award finalists on the intranet. Successive CPAs had noted increased morale, confidence and competence among managers, and though it is difficult to attribute direct causality, the qualitative evidence gathered in the fieldwork interviews suggests that the development activities funded by Direct Support have made a significant contribution to these improvements.

As with other case studies, a key determinant of the positive impact of the activities was the extent to which the organisation was committed to the process of capacity building. In this authority there was clear evidence that the individual, team and systems development that had been undertaken were seen as important at senior levels of the organization and that staff understood and welcomed this. Activities undertaken with Direct Support benefited because they were part of an organisation-wide and sustained programme of activities designed to develop the capacity of the workforce and organization. The establishment of a project teams database, drawn from profiles established at Management Development Centres (and including Rising Stars), for instance, provides evidence of the authority's commitment to integrated capacity building activities and harnessing the outcomes of individual development for organisational improvement.

## 9.4 Case Study 4

### 9.4.1 Context and Concept

The council is made up of five main population centres and covers 106km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of the smaller metropolitan boroughs in terms of its geographical footprint. The borough has a population of 211,800, of which 8.3% are from black and minority ethnic communities. The council has over 5,000 (FTE) employees (excluding school-based staff). The council's gross revenue budget for 2005/06 was £353 million, while they managed a capital programme of £44.7 million in the same period.

Having been one of the first metropolitan authorities to switch to Labour control in the early days of the national Labour government, the council's administration changed after the local elections in 2004, when there was a swing back to the Conservatives. The current composition of the full council is as follows: Conservative – 39; Labour – 20; Liberal Democrat – 4.

Thus, after a decade when they did not have control of the council, the Conservative group has been able to make up the administration since 2004, occupying all the places on the council's Executive.

The new administration introduced a new management structure, resulting in the establishment of a streamlined Executive Management Team with reinforced management accountabilities. The Executive Management Team is now seen as a vehicle for providing 'strong and effective leadership focused on continual performance improvement across all service Areas'. The council appointed a new Chief Executive to head up this Team in July 2005, during which time he has been responsible (among other things) for overseeing the council's participation in the latest round of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The establishment of new political and managerial leadership has resulted in the generation of new priorities for the community and the council, as reflected in Corporate Plan 2005-2008. This has been devised in such a way as to ensure a 'crosscutting approach to service delivery' through shared priority working groups and has strengthened the council's 'corporate engine'. Additionally, the council has worked to align financial, performance and risk management functions to ensure that resources are allocated in line with corporate priorities and value for money targets. The council has used cashable efficiency savings (£1.3 million in 2004/5) to support their improvement agenda and priorities, including the allocation of additional resources to support the HR function in order to 'support the further development of a high performing, flexible and innovative workforce'. Work is currently being concluded on the production of 'sustainable training programmes' for all council officers and elected members.

Having improved their CPA rating from 'weak' in 2002 to 'fair' in December 2004, the council's rating under the new CPA regime is '**improving well** and demonstrating a **2 star** overall performance' (July 2005). The following



summarises the findings of the Audit Commission's most recent Direction of Travel Analysis:

[the council]... is improving many services. Pupil attainment consistently exceeds that in similar councils and is improving faster than national averages. Adult social care services have improved significantly. Performance in benefits administration remains good. The planning service has changed the way it works to speed up significantly the time it takes to process applications. Recycling rates have improved since April and are now on target. Most services show improvement but some remain comparatively poorly performing. The Council has taken action in these areas. Additional investment in housing was secured by the Council transferring its stock, but it is too early to say if improvements have resulted. Social care services for children have improved but still have some way to go. Speed in determining special educational needs applications is not improving quickly enough. [the council]... is in a better position this year to deliver its priorities. Leadership is now providing a clearer focus, it has improved its financial position and the way it manages its performance. The Council has recognised shortages in capacity to deliver some plans and is beginning to address this.

Innovative elements of the Council's approach to securing performance improvement includes the operation of a 'Performance Champions Group' and a Shared Priorities Coordinators Group, which enable managers to work together to provide 'joined-up' solutions to corporate challenges. Additionally, the council has established a 'Performance Improvement Board' (made up of representatives of ODPM, Audit Commission, IDeA, peer members and executive officers from neighbouring authorities) to inform work on its improvement agenda.

#### 9.4.2 Background to / Content of Bids for Direct Support

The original bid for Direct Support (December 2003) identified weaknesses in leadership and performance management as the key areas requiring attention to enhance the council's ongoing work on the improvement agenda. The bid also detailed the following five key strands of the council's pre-existing change programme, which had been supported by £100,000 investment (and which had gone some way towards improving their rating between 2002 and 2003):

- **Transformational Change / New Ways of Working** (including reconfiguration of the council's structures, area-based service delivery model for some activities and integrated service delivery model for others);
- **Partnership Working** (including work with the LSP and Crime & Disorder Partnership, and the establishment of a Children & Young People's Trust and a Leisure Trust;
- **Leadership / Management Development** (including launch of Leadership Programme for 30 top tier managers [devised / run by a local university Business School], and establishment of several management forums);



- **Performance Improvement** (including reviews of key services, improved communications with community and partnership with an external consultants to improve Benefits Service); and
- **Improved Business Systems & Processes** (including introduction of IBIS, development of Corporate Plan and Performance Management Framework and introduction of integrated business units).

These priorities, previous actions and bid for Direct Support were identified and acted upon by the council's senior management team. The resulting bid incorporated a range of specific proposals, based on this team's evaluation of the impact of the previous work, and designed to address the outstanding areas of weakness. The proposals included the following elements, focusing on three key strands:

- **Transformational Change / New Ways of Working** (including *Managing Together*, with input from external consultants, establishing process to conduct management summit to plan future improvement processes);
- **Partnership Working / Performance Improvement** (including extension of partnership with external consultants to conduct further reviews of council services [Special Educational Needs, Contact Centre, Strategic Planning, Development Control and Integrated Business Units]); and
- **Leadership / Management Development** (including extension of a local university Business School Leadership Programme for next tier of senior managers, participation in a local authority consortium Training & Development Programme, and establishment [with the Work Foundation] of a development programme for middle managers).

The bid incorporated specific reference to evaluating the effectiveness of each of the activities for which funding (£110,000) was awarded, along with a commitment to roll out the learning from their delivery and evaluation. Further reference was made to the need to contribute towards the development of programmes and activities through a local association of local authorities, both to transfer learning and for the council to derive additional direct benefits.

As a result of the council's experience with (and a 'robust' evaluation of) the activities developed and delivered during the first round of funding, a second bid was developed specifically to address the capacity building and development needs of elected members and middle managers. This re-focusing of capacity building activity reflected the view emerging from the evaluations that the priorities addressed under the first round of funding were too broadly defined and not detailed enough to be linked to the council's specific capacity building needs. The second bid was developed with greater involvement of lower levels of management, allowing capacity building needs to be defined from within the organisation rather than from the top down. At the same time, efforts were made to align the second bid more closely with emerging national priorities.

A critical factor in determining the focus of the second bid was the change in political control of the council's administration after the 2004 elections, and the council's ongoing organizational restructuring. While the new executive had ample political experience, they had no experience in running the council under the new executive arrangements, and it was felt necessary to develop their capacity to meet the demands of their newly-acquired roles rapidly. The bid was submitted prior to the appointment of the council's new Chief Executive, but organizational changes continued to be introduced, and it was recognized that management needed additional capacity to embrace and implement these changes. Thus, the priorities in the second bid were the development of elected members (with a particular emphasis on the executive and newly-elected members) and middle management (perceived as the 'leaders of the future'). Both these groups underwent training needs analyses to inform the bid, and the following activities were identified to address these needs:

### **Elected Members**

- Intensive support to the Cabinet (focusing on five aspects – strategic management, financial management, performance management, portfolio roles and responsibilities, and individual mentoring; and
- Support to new Members (with three elements – understanding the council, dealing with casework and reaffirming the 'buddy' system)

Proposed activities for elected members included a number of workshops, development of links with another local authority in another part of the country (identified as a suitable partner for mentoring) and the delivery (by the IDeA) of a tailored member development programme. Additionally, two senior members of the Cabinet were identified as potential beneficiaries of the Leadership Academy.

### **Middle Managers**

A competency-based development programme was proposed to further develop 150 middle managers, providing them with a greater understanding of the council's strategic position and developing their skills to take the council's priorities forward. Additionally, it was proposed that two cohorts of middle managers (20 in total) could participate in a locally run local government Management Programme.

#### **9.4.3 Accessing Direct Support**

It was generally felt that the process of bidding for Direct Support worked well and was facilitated adequately by national processes and *pro-formas*, especially in linking individual development to organizational change and improvement. The council was first alerted to the potential to bid for Direct Support by a significant individual in the Government Office. His contribution to the development of the bids (especially the second bid) was identified as particularly helpful, enabling the council to align their proposals with national priorities and to better understand the application process.

While the first bid was developed mainly by the top team, responsibility for the second bid was delegated to lower tier managers, and its production was overseen by the council's Learning & Development Manager. The council also undertook widespread consultation for the second bid with middle managers in particular, using an established framework to get input from below. Elected members have been fully engaged in the process, and recognise the need for capacity building.

The evaluation of the delivery of the first round of Direct Support funded activity was invaluable in developing the second bid, helping to incorporate a better understanding of the organisation's capacity building needs and to shape and refine the evidence base for support.

#### **9.4.4 Impact of Direct Support Capacity Building Activities**

There is evidence to suggest that the activities undertaken with Direct Support funding have made a significant impact at all levels within the authority. In assessing the overall impact, it is important to note that it seems unlikely that any of the activities described could have been implemented at all without access to additional dedicated resources, allowing the council to address areas 'where the shoe pinches the most'. All benefits accruing to these activities can therefore be attributed to the Direct Support funding. Indeed, given the success of these activities, there is a sense that they have been 'critical' to the development of wider improvement work subsequently devised and implemented by the council.

##### **9.4.4.1 Benefit to Individuals**

It is felt that the impact of the initiative at an individual level has been 'invaluable'. For example, participation in the training programme for middle managers enabled respondents to develop a wider understanding of the context within which their service was being delivered. Presentations on the local government modernisation agenda, theories of change management and devolved financial management models ensured that the programme was both theoretical as well as practical, therefore ensuring relevance to all participants. One respondent indicated that the programme had bred in her cohort a 'passion for change', and that she felt the council's commitment to a 'servant leader' style of community leadership was personally and professionally inspiring. Senior managers' have been impressed with the personal outcomes of managers participating in the programme, identifying the added 'energy and enthusiasm' they now bring to their jobs, which they approach in a 'more open and engaged' manner. The effect on personal creativity and innovation has also been identified, the programme being credited with a 'yeast effect', as new ideas permeate through the authority.

Similarly, the member development work is perceived to have raised the profile of competency / capacity among members of all political persuasions within the organisation. As a result, the executive is working in a highly efficient manner, ensuring that members are able to make well-informed decisions, while newly-elected members are better equipped to fulfil their scrutiny responsibilities. There is a sense that there is increased cross-party working on a range of issues, and that this has made the role of elected

member more rewarding. It is widely acknowledged that, without the Direct Support capacity building activities, the transition to a new leadership could have been chaotic and may have led to major disruptions in the council's strategic direction.

#### 9.4.4.2 *Benefit to Teams / Departments*

Participants in the Leadership Programme have been encouraged to use case studies from their own areas of activity as the locus for their learning. For example, one respondent used the implementation of a new devolved financial management system as the basis for their case study work on the programme. It is felt that the system has benefited from different theories applied during the programme and, as a result, managers are getting better information than would have otherwise been the case.

A networking group has been established for managers who have participated in the programme, and this is seen as having been successful in 'bedding in' some of the lessons learnt from the programme into continuous improvements in service design and delivery. Managers are able to access support from their peers within the organisation, and can provide / receive ongoing support to the direct benefit of service delivery. This group has also been used as the focus on consultations with middle managers about ongoing developments in corporate policies and in devising a range of projects in response to central government initiatives. Additionally, the establishment of a 'Change Team' – including managers who have participated in the programme, along with representatives of partner agencies – has also ensured that learning from the programme is being embedded in service planning and delivery.

#### 9.4.4.3 *Organisational Benefits*

There is evidence to suggest that the council has 'bought into' the process of capacity building, and that a concerted effort is being made to develop systems and procedures to enhance individual and corporate performance. An example of how senior management has made this commitment clear is the 'signing up' of the Chief Executive recently as a 'Strategic Mentor' for participants in the next stage of the council's Leadership Programme. Up to ten 'young' managers will be participating in this programme, charged with taking forward projects comprising a key part of the council's change management process. It is acknowledged that this work requires a significant personal commitment from the participants, and the Chief Executive has taken on the mentoring role to show that he acknowledges and is prepared to match this commitment.

Individual learning from the Direct Support programme has been embedded in the organisation, as a 'critical mass' of elected members and middle managers has participated in the activities. For example, one respondent indicated that there has been a significant shift in the organisation's strategic thinking. Whereas previously the corporate centre was perceived as having a '*laissez faire* attitude' to the council's services (which allowed 'fiefdoms' to operate), there is now a much more hands-on leadership style, and all service areas are linked more closely to the council's corporate agenda. At the same

time, there has been a shift in perspective within the organisation; with respondents indicating that the council is no longer 'inward-looking', having used the Direct Support process to develop a set of relationships with external organisations to inform their development. In particular, Direct Support funded activities have been devised and implemented in partnership with peer authorities (including the Council on the elected member peer mentoring initiative) and other councils in the sub-region (with the Leadership Programme being devised and run through a local authority network).

An additional benefit has been a perceived shift in the council's attitude towards risk management. Whereas previously the council was felt to be 'extremely risk averse', it is now felt that the corporate systems have given service managers sufficiently 'strong foundations' to enable them to introduce more 'creative' tools and techniques.

Although receiving a relatively small amount of the overall Direct Support funding, the council's work with a private sector partner has made possibly the most significant impact, contributing to the development of a performance management culture at all levels within the council, from elected members through to front-line staff. Their work with a number of key services (originally identified as they were perceived to have failings in their management / delivery systems) has effectively enabled the council to review them 'through a performance management lens'. As a result, a performance management culture has pervaded the council, a greater self-awareness has been embedded in all service areas, and the consultants have been able to instil new performance management skills in existing staff, including crucially the council's senior managers. The establishment of a 'Champions Group', made up of senior managers and meeting monthly to oversee progress against the council's Corporate Performance Improvement Plan is one example of how this approach has been embedded. (The aspiration of this group is to raise the council's CPA rating from 2\* to 3\* by the end of 2006).

Based on the successes of their Direct Support funded work, the consultants have undertaken further work with the corporate core, strengthening the capacity of the Policy & Performance Team to enable them to drive change through the council more effectively. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that the new systems put in place as a result of contracting the consultants have generated nearly £2.3 million in savings, some of which has been re-allocated to support the continuation of work on the council's improvement agenda, including capacity building activities. It is estimated that work for which the consultants are currently tendering (covering asset management and change management) has the potential to generate a further £10 million in savings for the council.

#### **9.4.5 Other Capacity Building Activities**

The council has implemented a range of activities designed to drive forward the improvement agenda and to secure enhanced CPA ratings over the long term. These include elements which correspond to the ODPM's interpretation

of capacity building, some of which are summarised earlier in the report. These activities include the following corporate initiatives, all of which have been devised to incorporate attention to the personal and organisational development needs of all staff:

- production of a Corporate Performance Improvement Plan;
- production of a draft medium-term Financial Strategy and a guide to financial management and use of resources;
- appointing a Performance Improvement Champion for each major service, with regular meetings to monitor progress against the corporate performance improvement plans, to share best practice and be a catalyst for change;
- strengthening the council's performance management including consistent performance reporting and structured performance reviews with early identification and implementation of required improvement actions; and
- a 100 per cent staff survey.

One key element to the success of the council in moving the change agenda forward has been the operation of an Improvement Board. This draws on both external and internal expertise to ensure that the council is making progress against its improvement targets, as detailed in the corporate Performance Improvement Plan. Chaired by the Chief Executive of another neighbouring local authority (a CPA 'excellent' / 4\* authority), the Board also includes representatives from the ODPM, Audit Commission, IDeA, the Local Strategic Partnership and the consultants engaged with Direct Support, together with the council's leader, chief executive and other senior councillors and managers.

#### 9.4.6 Role of Direct Support

The contribution of Direct Support to the 'rapid improvement' made by the council was acknowledged by all respondents. In some cases (such as the commissioning the consultants to work on service-specific improvements), the funding has been used to pump-prime activities which have been rolled out using the council's own resources (generated by initial savings from their work) to impact across the council. In other cases (such as the member development programme), the funding has enabled the council to devise and implement activities tailor made to address their specific needs.

Additionally, the funding has been used to enable council staff to participate in externally-run activities (such as the local authority consortium Leadership Programme) from which they would otherwise have been unable to benefit.

The following aspects of Direct Support were identified as linked causally to the beneficial impacts:

- The scheme enabled the council to tailor the capacity building activity to meet local needs;
- The bidding process was clear and straightforward, and made it possible for the council to identify the linkages between their own priorities and the requirements of central government;



- Excellent support was provided to the council by their DCLG / Government Office contact;
- The measurement system adopted by the scheme (particularly for the second bid) was based on appropriate and user-friendly output measures;
- The flexibility of the scheme allowed the council to carry forward £25,000 underspend at the end of the first year, ensuring that valuable additional resources were not lost due to unforeseen obstacles to implementation;

The discontinuation of Direct Support to the council is seen as a retrograde step, partly because it has been so successful, and partly because it has not been in place for long enough for there to be confidence its impact can yet be sustained. It is felt to be particularly unhelpful in the case of what was originally a 'weak' council that has made such significant progress, when it is anticipated that even more effort will be required for them to 'continue the journey' towards an 'excellent' / 4\* rating. It is anticipated that the constraints described below in relation to the limited resources at the council's disposal for staff development will be felt more than ever in the period following the discontinuation of Direct Support funding.

#### **9.4.7 Future Capacity Building Needs**

The council's capacity building needs are predominantly shaped by their size and resource constraints. The council's staff complement is relatively small, with services run by the smallest staffing levels possible without compromising quality. This 'leanness' makes the council 'vulnerable' to staff absences or departure, and the loss of one key member of staff can have serious repercussions for the their service and the council as a whole. These constraints and organisational needs are particularly significant in the council's corporate core. Teams responsible for developing and overseeing the council's corporate strategies, especially those relating to the change / improvement agendas, are unusually small, meaning that individual officers are responsible for large and complex pieces of work, responsibility for which cannot easily be reallocated if the leave or are absent. At the same time, the council does not offer especially competitive pay and rewards packages for their staff, compounding national problems in local government recruitment. As a result, the council recognises the need to 'grow our own leaders', and to ensure they have an effective succession strategy in place to respond to staff turnover issues. The Leader of the Council is pleased with the performance of the council, but sees further challenges. Having addressed 'immediate issues', the Leader believes the council still has work to do on embedding a complete plan and strategy in order to remain 'on track'. She sees benefits including better recruitment and retention of good leaders, acknowledging that an 'excellent' council would attract more people, while 'only brave people' would want to work for a 'weak' authority.

Although significant progress has been made in the past two years, through the Direct Support funded activities and other council initiatives, it is acknowledged that there remain skills and knowledge issues that need to be addressed, particularly around change management. There is a need to ensure that understanding of the transformation agenda penetrates to all levels, from team leaders right through to senior management. This applies

to the need to develop both a 'toolbox' of management techniques (such as project / programme management and process re-engineering) and a culture of 'softer' skills (such as people management).

Similarly, although much progress has been ascribed to the work on member development, it is acknowledged that further work is necessary to bring the council's complement of 63 elected members up to speed with the change agenda. Success in supporting the development of leading members now needs to be matched by progress for the remaining councillors who have not benefited from / participated fully in the programme thus far.

The following needs have been identified in the council's Learning Plan submitted to the relevant regional Improvement Partnership as part of the consultation process about future allocation of CBP resources; all apply to managers and senior managers, several additionally apply to frontline staff, while some (as identified) apply only to specific cohorts:

- Equalities and Diversity from induction to service specific solutions;
- Community Leadership, engagement and user focus;
- Internal Communication and Consultation;
- Developing leadership capacity – framework, measures and related input for senior and middle managers;
- Establish a sustainable approach to Organisational Development for the council;
- Performance management (including models where appropriate);
- Project management skills, to build upon the Performance and Programme Management National Programme/
- Generic change management skills and approaches to the specific
- Service improvement agendas;
- Promote customer focus, including customer care skills;
- Skills to promote partnership working;
- Sustain the local authority consortium Leadership Development Capacity Building course and programme;
- Commissioning and procurement;
- Workforce planning skills – from basic to strategic visioning and service redesign;
- Comprehensive skills audit across the council;
- Promotion of basic HR skills across all levels of management;
- Standards and Governance for staff and managers;
- Increase HR capacity / skills (HR staff);
- Every Child Matters – Introduction of core competencies (Children and Young People's Service); and
- Establish and resource a range of diagnostic and development solutions for elected members, to build upon the member development framework (Members).

#### 9.4.8 Conclusions

The council has been able to use Direct Support funding to deliver high quality capacity building activities and embed effective improvement activity. This has been linked to the council's Corporate Performance Improvement



Plan and addresses weaknesses identified in their CPA reports. Direct Support has enabled capacity building activity to take place that the council would not otherwise have been able to run, principally due to a lack of resources.

The availability of Direct Support funding allowed the council to adopt innovative approaches to addressing their organisational development and capacity building needs. Specifically, the appointment of the consultants to implement new performance management procedures – initially in one service perceived to be failing in this regard – was a bold and unusual step. The result of this application of Direct Support funding has had a profound impact on the council's culture. As a result, the council has used other resources from their own budget (including savings generated by the Direct Support funded pilot) to employ the services of the consultants in a number of other services and at the corporate core, further extending the impact of the Direct Support outcomes.

The allocation of resources was appropriate, and was evaluated effectively to ensure it addressed agreed priorities. Direct Support also enabled the council to address their own identified corporate capacity building priorities within the context of the government's agenda, a process that was through the support they received from their DCLG / Government Office contact.

The projects and activities developed with Direct Support funding have contributed directly to the authority's improvement, and there is evidence of the activities having led to change at individual (for both officers and elected members) and organisational levels. New systems and management processes have been put in place as a result of the Direct Support funded activities, and are becoming embedded in the organizational culture.

One key to the success of the Direct Support funded activities has been the input of committed staff with appropriate expertise. Within the council, it is evident that the drive and enthusiasm of the Learning & Development Manager has ensured that the programme has been well-managed, while the commitment of senior managers and politicians (including the Chief Executive and the Leader of the council) have ensured that lessons learnt from the programme have been embedded. The quality of the support provided by the DCLG / Government Office contact was commented upon by several respondents, all of whom acknowledged the crucial role he played in helping the council to shape their programme to reflect central government priorities. Finally, specific reference has also been made to the input of externally-commissioned expertise, specifically the academic leading the local university Business School's input into the delivery of the Leadership Programme and the consultant's senior officer. The only factor cited as contributing (in a few, rare cases) to any perceived failings in the Direct Support funded activities related to the quality of the staff delivering specific elements; and the commitment of the participants, some of whom (mostly elected members) failed to engage fully in the process.

# 10 Appendix C: Topic Guide

Local Government Capacity Building Evaluation Topic Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews in LAs Receiving Direct Support

These interviews will be with respondents at a variety of levels of the organization. It is important to find out why things may or may not have worked and to assess the extent to which a major change in organizational culture has occurred as opposed to a specific project merely being implemented. Evidence of impact/costs etc needs to be gathered.

## 1 Context

***Please ask respondents to talk about the concept of capacity.***

- 1.1 What do you understand by the term capacity and what does it mean for your organisation?
- 1.2 What contextual factors do you feel impact on the capacity of the local government sector as a whole?
- 1.3 What do you feel are the key contextual factors shaping your authority's capacity/capacity needs/success or failure of capacity building activities?
- 1.4 Do you think that these have changed over the last two years?
- 1.5 How do you think these will change over the next two / five / ten years?

## 2 Capacity and Capacity Needs

*Ask them to speak about the capacity needs of their authority or the sector now and in the near future.*

2.1 What are your authority's capacity needs?

2.2 How did you arrive at these?

- Prompts:
  - E.g. was this a collective process or is it just their view.
  - It is part of a strategic planning process tied to community strategy/ corporate plan?
  - It is a regular process or a one off?
  - Is it done at a corporate or a departmental level – and is this changing?
  - Etc etc

### 2.3 What role did CPA play in this process?

### 2.4 In what ways do you feel that your authority has sufficient capacity?

- Prompts:
  - E.g. was this a collective process or is it just their view.
  - Is it part of a strategic planning process tied to community strategy/ corporate plan?
  - Was there a role for CPA in this process?
  - Etc etc

### 2.5 How do you think your capacity needs have changed over the last two years?

### 2.6 How do you think that your capacity needs will change over the next two / five / ten years?

## 3 Engagement with the Capacity Building Programme

*Ask them to speak about the background and rationale behind their use of direct support.*

### 3.1 Please describe the activities undertaken with support of your bid for direct support from the CBP?

N.B. INTERVIEWERS SHOULD HAVE A FULL LIST OF CBP PROGRAMMES PARTICIPATED IN BY THE AUTHORITIES.

### 3.2 What outcomes were/are expected as a result of these actions?

*Try to tease out the assumed linkages between the activities and the expected outcomes.*

### 3.3 How is progress toward these outcomes measured?

- How robust is this framework?
- Have there or are there likely to be any changes to that framework? Why?

### 3.4 What/who were the drivers behind choosing these activities?

*Try to get an insight into who was responsible – the individual and organizational dynamics.*

### 3.5 What has been the role of elected members and senior managers (eg Chief Exec and Service Directors) in this?

- Were they resistant or open to change? Why?
- Has there been a change in this? Why?

- What were the catalysts and critical factors?

### 3.6 Would these activities have happened without CBP?

Critically, to what extent was the CBP responsible for these things happening?

### 3.7 How successful was the process of establishing these activities?

- PROMPTS:
  - Did they get the support they needed?
  - Was the process clear?
  - How important was it that the activities were designed within the authority rather than being 'ready made' or imposed activities from outside?
  - What were the barriers/facilitators between the Partners and why?
  - What were the barriers/facilitators between the Partners and central government and why?
  - Did the process help refine the bid?
  - Was emphasis lost as a result of time lags? Etc etc
  - How could it have been better?

## 4 Impact of CBP

*Ask them to talk about the impact of the Direct Support activities in the authority at three distinct levels and then briefly consider the implications of this for the sector as a whole.*

### 4.1 What impact do you feel the Direct Support you received has had or will have in the near future at the level of the individuals involved?

- What were the reasons for the impact?
- Why did it work? And evidence?
- Why didn't it work? And evidence?
- What good practice can be highlighted?
- What lessons have been learned?
- What was related to the activities themselves and what was related to other contextual factors?

### 4.2 What impact do you feel it has had or will have in the near future at the level of the teams/department involved?

- What were the reasons for the impact?
- Why did it work? And evidence?
- Why didn't it work? And evidence?
- What good practice can be highlighted?
- What lessons have been learned?
- What was related to the activities themselves and what was related to other contextual factors?

#### 4.3 What impact do you feel it has had or will have in the near future at the level of the authority, particularly on authority wide or corporate systems and processes?

- What were the reasons for the impact?
- Why did it work? And evidence?
- Why didn't it work? And evidence?
- What good practice can be highlighted?
- What lessons have been learned?
- What was related to the activities themselves and what was related to other contextual factors?

#### 4.4 How will this contribute to sector-wide capacity?

- What were the reasons for the impact?
- Why did it work? And evidence?
- Why didn't it work? And evidence?
- What good practice can be highlighted?
- What lessons have been learned?
- What was related to the activities themselves and what was related to other contextual factors?

#### 4.5 How cost effective do you feel that it has been?

- Have savings/efficiencies been generated?
- Can/have these been quantified in any way?
- Where other evidence is there to support this view?
- Where have they gone, what have they done with any savings?
- Is there potential for more savings and what are the barriers to achieving them?

#### 4.6 How sustainable are the impacts on the organisation?

- Specifically, to what extent is it appropriate to talk about a change in organizational values or culture?
- What evidence is there of this?
- Why/why not?

#### 4.7 Has CBP funded activities encouraged different use of other funding streams/corporate investment?

- In what ways?
- Why/Why not?
- Barriers? Facilitators?

## 5 Current Capacity Building/Recovery Support Activity (General)

*Ask them to speak about capacity building activities that they/their organization is involved with that is not CBP funded. This is so that we get an idea of the relative scale of leverage applied by the CBP.*

**5.1 Please briefly describe you current capacity building activities / i.e. how you are addressing capacity needs?**

**5.2 To what extent are these activities successful?**

Brief review of evidence in support of the answer.

**5.3 What factors are shaping the success or failure of these?**

- What are the barriers?
- What are the critical success factors or drivers?
- Engagement of elected members/senior management?
- Systems changes?
- Cultural/values changes?

**5.4 How significant is the Direct Support in relation to these other activities and overall change in the authority?**

Trying to get an indication of the scale of leverage provided by the CBP here.

## 6 Policy Linkages

*Ask them to speak about how their Direct Support activities and how they relate to wider policy objectives.*

**6.1 How do you think that the project is contributing to efficiency?**

**6.2 How do you think that the project is contributing to the implementation of the 'pay and workforce' strategy?**

**6.3 How do you think that the project is contributing to equality and diversity?**

**6.4 How do you think that the project is contributing to the shared priorities?**

**6.5 How do you think that the project is contributing to creating sustainable communities?**

## 7 Future Demand for Capacity Building

- 7.1 What capacity building needs do you expect to have over the next two years?
- 7.2 What capacity building needs do you expect to have over the next five years?
- 7.3 What capacity building needs do you expect to have over the next ten years?
- 7.4 How could the Capacity Building Programme best meet those needs?

## 8 Other Comments

- 8.1 Do you have anything else that you like to add about capacity, capacity building activities or the Capacity Building Programme?